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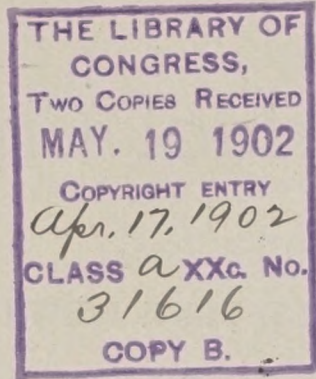
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In. vol. Feb. 1, 13,

—TO—

JOHN D. NIX, ESQ.,

OF THE NEW ORLEANS BAR,

*This Book is Respectfully Dedicated.*







## BY WAY OF PREFACE.

This is not the story of a haunted house, nor are ghosts paraded for the mystification of the reader; it is simply the chronicle of events which took place in the dim long ago, when chivalry and frivolity ruled over the old French town founded by Gouverneur Bienville.

The characters depicted in these pages are not mere marionettes, manufactured for the purpose of fiction. Most of them lived, loved and hated at a time when our grandfathers were boys and all that section outside of the *Vieux Carre* was almost a wilderness. No doubt many of our venerable citizens, as they smile over the escapades of the quartette of absinthe drinkers, will recognize old comrades; and who knows whether they will not recall to mind the time when they themselves were clinking glasses and exchanging *bon mots* in the famous old Absinthe House?

The nucleus of this story was begun about ten years ago, shortly after the publication of the author's first book, "Romances of New Orleans." Owing to press of other matters, its completion was put off from time to time and it was not until last year that decisive steps were taken



for its publication. The intention was to call the book "The Heart of a Man" and the original subscription contracts bear that name; but Mlle. Titine suggested "The Haunted Bridal Chamber" and to Mlle. Titine the author refers you if you wish to argue the matter. And for a corroboration of the momentous dialogue in the *Restaurant de la Louisiane*, go and interview the grieving Fernand Alciatore, who to this day ruefully contemplates the geometric figures he innocently chalked down at deponent's request on the memorable night of the christening of this book.

What mimicry of fate that the corner of Carondelet and Common streets should to-day be the radiating point of the business and financial vortex of the metropolis! Shade of Monsieur Boulotte, arise from thy long sleep and weep over the desecration! Where once stood Madam Pradel's stately colonial mansion and tropical gardens, the Hennen Building rears its majestic crest and the legendary traditions of the past have been trodden under foot by the American—that restless, money-mad, iconoclastic race which has immolated the chivalric and grandiose on the altar of Progress. Poor old Monsieur Boulotte! Weep in thy impotent wrath and retire to thy long and peaceful sleep for all eternity.

GEORGE AUGUSTIN.

NEW ORLEANS, APRIL, 1902.



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“For All Eternity.”



## PROLOGUE.

### AT MILNEBURG.

Seated on the wooden railing at the end of the long pier which juts into Lake Pontchartrain from the village of Milneburg, dreamily watching the rose-red sun as it dipped lower and lower in the limpid waters, suffusing the hazy atmosphere with soft, shimmering light—I was suddenly aroused from my reverie by a feminine voice pleasantly saying:

“Good evening, poet and dreamer.”

I turned to look at the speaker.

“Why, good evening, Mademoiselle Titine. What brings you to this secluded corner of the world?”

“I just came over from Mandeville on the *Camelia*. I saw you worshipping the setting sun, and made bold to intrude, to scold you a bit. You don’t even stop at the shop any more now?—*Ah, le villain!*”

“I have been very busy lately.”

“Too busy to stop just a minute? Since Madame Zulette went away, you have gradually estranged yourself—and now it is three months since we last saw you! Do you think it is fair?”



I could not refrain from smiling at the little French woman's earnestness.

"I confess I have been remiss," I said, "but there are extenuating circumstances. Let us adjourn to the refreshment pavilion and discuss the matter over soda-water and cakes."

After the waiter had served us, I began:

"I have been leading a hermit's life for the past three months. Do you remember what a matinee fiend I used to be? Well, I have not been to the theatre since Bernhardt and Coquelin played at the Tulane."

Mlle. Titine stopped in the act of sipping her soda-water and looked quizzically at me.

"This is strange—very strange," she said, dubiously shaking her head; "in fact, it is incredible. And what became of that pretty young lady I saw you with at the Grand so often?"

"I have not seen her since Mardi Gras eve."

Mlle. Titine was thoughtful for a moment; then, as if enlightened by a sudden idea:

"Is it possible that you are studying for the priesthood?"

I burst out laughing.

"Oh, no!—I am too worldly to do such a thing."

"Then why this sudden seclusion from the world?"

Leaning over and sinking my voice to a whisper, I said:

*"I have been writing a new book!"*

The little lady gave a sigh of relief.

"How you frightened me! I thought you were about to make some terrible revelations. *Ah, farceur!* Of course it's poetry?"



"No—it is a novel."

"What is it about?"

"Old-time New Orleans. I wrote the last chapter this morning. Everything is ready for the printer, with one exception."

"And that is—"

"The title."

"It seems to me this ought to be an easy task, after the book is written."

"It is easier to write a book than to find a suitable title for it."

"Perhaps I can help you.—What is the plot?"

"It is well-known to you—the story of the old house in which you carry on business."

"I thought you had given up the idea?"

"No—I was only waiting for the inspiration."

"And when it came, you immediately sat down and wrote like a madman until the work was finished, forgetting even your dearest friends? *Ah, egoiste!*"

She playfully tapped me with her fan, then resumed:

"I always thought there was good material for a beautiful romance in the traditions of the Dumont family, as told to Madame Zulette by Peau-d'Or, the reformed Voodoo Queen, who was reputed to be one hundred and thirty years old when she died. You must remember seeing her at our house in the Faubourg Marigny?"

"Oh yes—we were great friends, the old witch and I. She took a liking to me because I could converse with her in Congo lingo and told me wonderful stories—which were religiously converted into cash by your humble servant, through the medium of newspaperdom. And when the old *sorciere* died—in 1897, I believe—I was one of her sincerest



mourners—for reasons I need not dilate upon.”

Mlle. Titine shook her head and her little gray eyes twinkled mischievously.

“Well, well!” she said, half-scoldingly. “So it was purely from mercenary motives that you were such a frequent visitor at our home?”

“Nothing else,” I answered, seeing she was joking.

“And while you were sipping our *cafe-noir* and eating our *calas*, you were probably figuring how much you would get for the latest story Peau-d’Or had told you?”

“Not probably, but certainly.”

“And you have the insolence to admit it?”

“Yes—because I can read unconditional pardon in your beaming countenance.—Permit me, mademoiselle.”

And I helped her to a monumental *choux-a-la-creme*—her favorite cake.

“I will forgive—on one condition.”

“And that is—”

“That you do penance by coming to see us as often as you used to.”

“Agreed—with the greatest of pleasure.”

I held out my hand and she warmly clasped it.

“Your gallantry is somewhat tardy, but is, nevertheless, appreciated,” observed my companion; then, laughingly: “Do you mention me in your story?”

“Most assuredly.”

“And Madame Zulette?”

“Yes.”

“And Lolotte, the Dumonts, Minette, the Boulottes, Little Marianne, Papa Frimoose, Millistoon, Chainarre, Gueneuille, Mere Jiguette—and all the people Peau-d’Or talked about?”



"Every one of them."

"I think that Guoneuille, the reporter and absinthe drinker, was a delightful personage. What did you do with his love letter to Little Marianne, which Madame Zulette gave you?"

"It will appear in full in the book. I have given a whole chapter to this remarkable production."

Mlle. Titine joyously clapped her hands.

"The book must be grand!" Then, as if suddenly recollecting something: "Ah, the name!" She was thoughtful a few moments, then resumed: "How dreadfully dull I am! I can't even think of such a simple thing as a name. And yet, it looks so easy.—What a noise that locomotive makes!"

The pondrous old-style engine, to which were attached the venerable cars of the Pontchartrain Railroad, was puffing great clouds of steam and making as much noise as a boiler factory in full blast.

"The Pontchartrain is the second oldest railroad in the United States," I remarked. "It was built in the twenties. It has shied at the march of progress and I believe the same rolling stock is used that delighted our grandparents when they were toddlers. But I notice that your glass is empty."

I was about to ring for the *garcon*, when there was a blood-curdling toot from the locomotive, as if a thousand demons were holding a Salvation Army meeting.

Mlle. Titine jumped to her feet.

"*Mon Dieu*, how that whistle frightened me!" she exclaimed, putting her hands to her ears. "If it is the same which was in use when your grandparents were babies, it must have scared the poor thing into fits. . . . Oh!"



She gave a nervous scream and ran towards me; then bursting into a merry laugh:

"That whistle must have unstrung my nerves; but he poked his head in so suddenly, I could not help from screaming."

I looked towards the door and saw the smiling features of genial, popular Mike Habans, the manager.

"Excuse me for intruding," he said, in his usual affable way, "but unless you don't mind walking in town, you had better hurry up. This is the last train."

I glanced at the clock.

"Ten o'clock already? I had no idea it was so late."

We boarded the train in the nick of time, for we were hardly seated, than conductor Colin Baker gave the signal, and the old cars, creaking and groaning began slowly moving over the trestle toward the village, a quarter of a mile away. As we passed the picturesque lighthouse, I observed:

"This is where the Lady of the Lake lives."

"Is the Lighthouse keeper a woman?"

"Yes; and a lady of culture and refinement, the descendant of one of the proudest and most illustrious families of Louisiana."

And I briefly told her the story of the "Lady of the Lake," as the brave little woman who looks after Uncle Sam's interests is called by frequenters of the Lake resort.

The train stopped for ten minutes at the village. From the car window, I pointed out to my companion the principal objects of interest—the old Washington Hotel, years ago the scene of grand fashionable balls, now a picturesque ruin; Boudro's Garden, the famous picnic grounds, where the *Sans Soucis* gave their last festival, twenty years ago;



Moreau's Restaurant, renowned for its game and fish; the tumbled-down depot, now abandoned, with the gaping holes in the grass-grown roof and its swaying weatherboarding. But the oddest sight of all, and which made Mlle Titine laugh till the tears ran down her cheeks, is the big sign, printed in bold characters, in front of Pete Bersetich's refreshment booth, which announces:

HAM, FISH AND TOBACCO SANDWICHES.

A tobacco sandwich strikes one as a decided novelty, indigenous to Milneburg—but by putting a period after the word "tobacco," the meaning is as clear as distilled water:

HAM, FISH AND TOBACCO. SANDWICHES.

At last the train crawled leisurely away . . . past the cypress swamps, teeming with night-life and strange noises; past the Hebrew Cemetery, whose walls loomed like enormous white arms in the spectral darkness; past the Gentilly Road, winding like a huge chalk-mark through the trackless swamps; past the grazing prairies, with their burning grasses and sluggish bayous . . . until the lights of the city blinked in the distance and what seemed an interminable journey, was happily drawing to an end. We had been silent since we had left Milneburg, for the roar of the train prevented any conversation. When we neared Claiborne Avenue, the train slackened almost to a walk. Mlle. Titine broke the silence:

"I have been thinking and thinking, trying to find a name for your story—but I find the task too great for my feeble imagination. I can suggest nothing."

"I had an idea of calling the book '*The Heart of a Man*,'" I remarked.

The little lady shook her head negatively.

"This would be a misnomer. Lucien Dumont, the hero,



had no heart." Then she added: "Come on, monsieur. The train has stopped. You will not have far to go to escort me home. Do you remember the old place?"

"O, yes—Rue Marigny. But it is too early yet to go in that direction. What say you to a little supper, to cement our reconciliation?"

"At this time of the night? Why it must be nearly eleven."

"It is no later than if we had gone to the theatre."

Mlle. Titine was thoughtful a few moments.

"Just to punish you, I'll accept. Where shall we go?"

"Mine host, Fernand Alciatore, of the world-famed *Restaurant de la Louisiane*, will be delighted to serve us a Lucullan repast and chalk it on ice."

We boarded a Claiborne Avenue car and shortly reached our destination. While waiting for the supper in the famous *rendez-vous* of the epicure and gourmet, the book again became the subject of conversation.

"The mystery of the moans and cries which are heard to this day in the old house has never been explained," observed Mlle. Titine. Why not call it—"

She stopped short and nodded a gracious greeting to Madame Bezaudun, who had just entered and was looking in our direction and smiling in that charming way which has made her so popular.

"Madame Bezaudun is a delightful old lady," observed my *vis-a-vis*. "She makes one feel so much at home."

"I corroborate every word you say," I answered, "but you were about to make a suggestion, I believe?"

I spoke in eager tones, for I had a vague feeling that the little milliner had at last been inspired.

"Since the tragedy which took place in the bridal chamber is a mystery to this day," she resumed, "why not



call the novel—”

She stopped short, in that exasperating way some people have when they think they have reached a climax.

“Go on Mlle. Titine,” I said, controlling my impatience.

“I know you will laugh at me, but I don’t mind it. Why not call it ‘*The Haunted Bridal Chamber?*’ ”

I arose and took her hands in mine, to Madame Bezaudun’s unfeigned look of astonishment at such an outbreak.

“This is an inspiration, Mlle. Titine. It is an ideal name. I shall certainly use it.”

And I did.





THE  
HAUNTED BRIDAL CHAMBER.







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# THE

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# HAUNTED BRIDAL CHAMBER.

.....

A ROMANCE OF OLD-TIME  
NEW ORLEANS.

.....

## CHAPTER I.

MADemoiselle TITINE, MILLINER.

Anyone in New Orleans can point out to you Mlle Titine's millinery establishment, "the little shop in the big building," which does quite an extensive business in the same stuffy quarters where its original founder, Madame Zulette, "from Rue de Chabanaix, Paris," located it in 1884, at the time of the great North, Central and South American Exposition, which attracted to Louisiana visitors from every corner of the globe; and when Madame Zulette returned to her beloved France fifteen years later, rich and happily re-married. Mlle. Titine, her forewoman, took



charge of the business. And on the plate-glass show-window, a modern inspiration of the present occupant of the quaint little shop, is emblazoned the following announcement, always kept scrupulously burnished:

( . . . . . )  
 :            MADAME ZULETTE,            :  
 :            *Modiste.*            :  
 :            M<sup>LE</sup> TITINE, SUC'R.            :  
 ( . . . . . )

It is a queer house, massively built, with sharp-pointed gables and mouldy-looking brick walls, cemented over with a kind of yellowish-brown composition, a combination of stucco and mortar, which has crumbled away at the sharp angles of the walls, revealing the red, porous brick underneath.

The modern plate-glass window takes up the whole front of the building, and is strangely in contrast with the antique facade and dilapidated walls. The little shop never fails to attract the attention of strangers on sight-seeing bent. In fact, the building has a national, if not world-wide, reputation for oddity and the grotesque mingling of ancient architecture and up-to-date innovations. Mardi-Gras visitors and tourists invariably ask to be shown "the last century house with the big plate-glass window."

The owner of the building has long since died. He left no will and no heirs, and his estate passed into the ownership of the State. The building being too old and dilapidated, and requiring too extensive repairs to render it



habitable, with the exception of the two rooms parallel with Conti Street, no attempt has ever been made to rehabilitate the exterior.

The reason why the corner room can still be used, is that the location charmed Madame Zulette when she looked about for a suitable site for her millinery shop, being central and within easy-walking distance from Boulevard Canal. She rented the two rooms for a mere pittance, clearing them of the accumulated rubbish of years, and throwing the debris into the adjoining rooms, without even investigating their contents or expressing a desire to go through the house. And for years and years no one had been through the abandoned rooms.

Madame Zulette had been warned that the house was haunted—that in the room overlooking the garden, a fearful tragedy had been enacted more than fifty years before; that strange noises and moans could be heard every time the Cathedral bells chimed the solemn hour of midnight, and that the ghost of a beautiful girl, with long, streaming yellow hair, roamed through the echoing rooms every night. But as no one had ever remained overnight in the old premises, and as a vacant lot separated the building from the adjoining property, the rumor had never been substantiated. That the house was haunted, no one doubted.

The occupants of the millinery shop did not have time to worry about ghosts. Madame Zulette was an exacting taskmaster and after the day's work was over, the girls were only too glad to go home to supper and rest. And the Madame would carefully lock the front door and seek her



vine-clad cottage in the Faubourg Marigny, where she would spend the balance of the evening in devising new styles in bonnets, hats and capes for her haughty clientele.

Ghosts? Zut! If there were such things, she had no inclination to bother her mind about them. They never molested the hats and fabrics in her shop and she did not care what orgies they indulged in while she was away.

Why the municipal authorities have not torn down the old structure, is one of those mysteries which the logician is at a loss to explain. The location is central and important, in the heart of the retail district. If the ancient pile was razed, the two lots on which it stands would no doubt find a ready sale. Perhaps it is permitted to remain because it is one of the few links between the romantic past and the iconoclastic present, and adds to the prestige of New Orleans as one of the most picturesque spots on the American Continent.

Mlle. Titine does not care to spend her own money on improvements, but she feels that she must be abreast of the times and not allow her rival, the impudent American across the way, who moved there only three years ago, and who has two huge plate-glass show-windows, one on each side of the door, to totally eclipse her. So she had the big window put in, and is serenely happy. And fashionable New Orleans, knowing that no one can make such *chic* bonnets and trim hats in such a fetchy way as Mlle. Titine, disdainfully ignores the gorgeous establishment opposite, and the little Parisian's bank account continues to grow larger day by day. But Mlle. Titine does not care very



much for money for present needs. Her ruling ambition is to put aside a sufficient sum to enable her to retire from active business when the years bend her supple form and dim her lustrous eyes; but as she is not yet thirty, the fastidious devotees of fashion need not feel alarmed.

Industrious Mlle. Titine! She has been in the millinery business ever since she was ten years old, when she used to carry hat-boxes to Madame Zulette's dainty Parisian clientele, and one can certainly pardon her for wishing to spend the declining years of her existence in rest and comfort amid her flowers and pets.

It is currently reported that the thrifty milliner has had twenty-seven actual offers of marriage, some of her suitors being real aristocrats, with the bluest of blue blood and unblemished ancestry; but having that disdain for men which is inherent in women who have made their own way in the world, she has elected to remain a *vielle fille*.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE SECRET OF THE OLD WALL.

I became acquainted with Madame Zulette in the Spring of 1888, while making extensive researches to write up the history of the old buildings of New Orleans for a local newspaper. In answer to my question as to the antiquity of the colonial edifice in which she carried on business, she said:

“Do you know that in the same room in which I work every day, hats were made and elegant toilettes fashioned while Napoleon was conquering the world?”

“I thought the business was started by you in 1884?”

“The present house was founded by me, but years ago, before you, your father, and probably what we now call old men, were born, the fashionable world of New Orleans used to come here, just as the present leaders of fashion do, and buy the dainty lace bonnets with which the beautiful Creole belles of that time adorned their persons. Step outside and I will show you something which, no doubt, no one of the present generation has ever noticed.”

Madame Zulette led the way through the narrow



door-way. She stopped when she reached the sidewalk and looked up the time-stained facade.

"Do you see anything over the door?" she asked.

I craned my neck and closely scrutinized the spot.

"No," I answered. "It seems a trifle darker than the stucco. It is no doubt dirt."

"Don't you see letters?"

"Letters?" I queried, wonderingly.

"Yes; look carefully. Wait: I'll get a step-ladder."

She went back into the little shop and immediately returned with a small extension ladder, which she placed against the wall.

"Get on top of the ladder and examine the spot carefully," said Madame Zulette. "I made the discovery while showing the scrub-woman how to clean the old wall the other day. You needn't fear. I'll hold the ladder."

By this time, three or four persons had stopped in front of the little shop, attracted by Madame Zulette's animated gesticulations and my attentive scrutiny of the building. It takes so little to draw a crowd in a busy thoroughfare. In my enthusiasm, I had lost sight of the fact that I was in public; but when I looked back and saw the gaping audience, I felt that the situation was getting ridiculous. But I could not retreat. Madame Zulette had been so graciously obliging and so solicitous to give me all the information within her power, that I could not offend her by refusing to comply with her request. So I climbed upon the ladder and she held both its sides with her chubby hands, so



I would not fall. When I reached the top, what appeared from the sidewalk to be mere daubs on the dingy surface of the wall, gradually took the shape of letters almost a foot long and I faintly, but distinctly made out the following words :

*VACHONETTE, MODISTE.*

Simple, commonplace words, yet what a flood of thought they caused to surge through my mind. In my excitement, I had climbed to the topmost rung of the ladder and peered eagerly at the inscription. Visions of beautiful women, with powdered hair and crinolines, passing in and out of the little shop : gaudily-liveried lackeys, standing straight as arrows in front of brilliant equipages ; gallants in knee-breeches, silver buckles, velvet coats and frills, bowing to their fair lady-loves ;—and thousands of other thoughts of an age made glorious by song and story, made me forget my prosaic surroundings.

How long I would have remained in contemplation and meditation on the topmost rung of the ladder, is a matter of debatable conjecture. I was presently called back to the world by a discordant nasal voice saying :

“ Say, mister, is the house on fire ? ”

I hastily descended from my perch. Turning to the spectators, which now numbered about fifty, I testily said :

“ No, it's not a fire, a murder, nor a bankrupt sale. I am simply examining the old rookery before putting in a bid for painting. That is all, gentlemen. Why in blazes don't you go about your business ? ”

The disappointed crowd quickly dispersed.



I carried the ladder inside for Madame Zulette.

“ Well, what do you think about it?” she asked. Then, woman-like, before I had time to answer : “ I know the history of this old building, monsieur. I got it from an ex-slave of the original owners of the old ruin. I am too busy to talk now, but come to my house in the Faubourg Marigny Sunday, after High Mass, and I will tell you all I know. You must now excuse me , monsieur. *Sans rancune, n'est-ce pas ?*”

She smilingly held out her hand. I cordially shook it and went out into the busy street.

The following Sunday, I called on Madame Zulette and she told me the history of the gloomy old colonial mansion, whose time-beaten walls are slowly, but surely, crumbling to pieces and which must soon feel the hand of the iconoclast and be numbered among the things that were, like everything else put up by the hand of man.

The story of this ancestral home is a strange and fascinating one. It tells of the misspent life of its last owner, Lucien Dumout, the wayward scion of a family renowned in the early history of Louisiana for the mental gifts of its men and the beauty and intellectual endowments of its women.

“ Is the story true?” I hear some curious little maiden ask. I believe it is. I took down copious notes when it was narrated to me and have reproduced in the chapters which follow a faithful recital of what Madame Zulette told me.



## CHAPTER III

LUCIEN DUMONT, ARTIST.

*"Lucien, viens diner!"*

---

Lucien Dumont, artist and dreamer and easy-going man of the world, put aside his brush with a sigh of relief.

*"Tout de suite, mon ange."*

He locked the door of his studio and descended to his room, where, after making a hasty toilette, he went down to the dining-room, where he found his sister Blanche waiting his coming before beginning the meal.

The voice which had called Lucien down to dinner was his sister's. She knew from long experience that he would not pay the slightest attention to bells or verbal summons through servants. So long as she would not come to the foot of the stairs leading to his studio and call him, he would not budge. Every day it was the same thing and she had grown so accustomed to the task, that she had come to look upon it as part of the programme of her uneventful life. And when her bosom friend and old class-mate, Madeline de St. Croix, sometimes jestingly remonstrated with her for this special



weakness, she would naively say :

“ Every man of talent has a hobby. Lucien is a genius and I humor him.”

And Madeline, who secretly loved the young artist, would shrug her shapely shoulders and remain silent.

The brother and sister lived alone with their slaves in the big, rambling house which had been built by an ancestor in the middle of the eighteenth century. It was constructed after the plan of the flats of Paris, though not so lofty—two stories and a high attic, with immense dormer windows in the front and rear; a wide hall running through the whole length of the second story, with large, high-ceiled rooms on each side. On the ground floor, was a massive porch, flanked on both sides by long, narrow rooms, which were occupied by funny little shops, representing almost every branch of trade of this primitive period. There were Caton et Moumounne, *coiffeurs*, who occupied the room next to the porch, towards St. Louis Street: Joubanc et Qneunard, confectioners, whose pies and *pates-feuilletees* were the delight of the epicure: Etienne D'Andans, dealer in dry goods and costly laces. As you passed the porch, towards Conti Street, you would come upon three other shops—Karl Schrenschrang's bookshop, with its musty volumes, nondescript bric-a-brac and antiquated curios: Melallah, Flafloosse et Niniche, importers of Oriental fabrics and commodities, whose smuggling operations were conveniently winked at by the authorities; and at the corner, was the establishment of Madame Julie Vachonette, *modiste a-la-mode*, the Mecca of the fashionable world of the last century.



Blanche Dumont's room faced on busy Rue Royal and overlooked the garden of the estate, which at that time extended almost to St. Louis Street. Lucien's room adjoined his sister's. On the other side of the hall, were the grand double parlors, often the scene of brilliant social gatherings. In the rear, were the sleeping apartments of Tobelle, Blanche's old nurse, and Labiche, Lucien's body-servant. The attic had been appropriated by the artist for a studio.

Lucien Dumont's studio was the coziest nook imaginable. Blanche had furnished it like a lady's boudoir. It was flooded with light from the two dormer-windows, through which, when one looked towards the River, could be seen the shipping in port and the yellow waters rushing on to the Gulf; and at the other end, one could look over the roofs of the low-built houses and see the semi-country landscape gradually merge into the low, swampy demense which stretched out in unbroken monotony to the shores of Lake Pontchartrain.

There Lucien painted and dreamed of Madeline de St. Croix through the long hours of the day. Blanche would often come up to chat and criticize. At times, she would bring her work basket with her and, placing a chair near one of the *lucarnes*, would alternately knit and stop to chatter about current events, her new dresses, the poor she had visited, their next *grande soiree*, and other topics which, -even if they did not interest Lucien, he pretended to enjoy hugely. They were great comrades. this brother and sister. a fact which one day caused Mademoiselle de St. Croix to playfully remark as she observed them:



"One would think you were sweethearts, instead of brother and sister."

Blanche smiled, arched her eye-brows and fixed her speaking eyes upon the young girl with such a mischievous expression, that she ran out of the room in great confusion, to hide her embarrassment from Lucieu. Blanche, greatly amused, ran after her, calling her, expostulating, cajoling,

"Why, dear, I did not say a word," she laughed.

"No: but the way you *looked!* You might just as well have said: 'Don't you wish you were in my place?' And right before that vain thing, too, whose big eyes see everything. I'll never be able to face him again." Then, bristling up: "Yes, giggle, giggle, giggle, you mean thing! I'll never speak to you again!"

For answer, Blanche embraced her effusively and pushed her into her room, where she coaxed her as one does a petulant child.

"You dear silly old goose," she said, caressingly. "Can't you see that Lucien adores you? I am only trying to smooth matters over for you both. Oh, but this is an ungrateful world."

And Madeline, overjoyed to have such a powerful ally, threw her arms around her friend's neck and the angel of peace once more reigned over their little world.

One by one the Dumonts had passed away, until the



race was almost, extinct Lucien being the last descendant in the male line.

"I am the last of the Dumonts," he would answer, when his sister praised Madeline and advised him to make her his wife. "I will never marry. When I die, the name of Dumont perishes. It is a name which the mutations of time have left unblemished and which I pray God no act of mine will ever tarnish."

Blanche would smile at this grandiloquent speech and bide her time, for her keen eyes had discovered that the young people loved each other and she felt certain that Mlle. de St. Croix would one day be her sister-in-law.

Lucien Dumont was ten years older than his sister. At the time this story begins, he was thirty. He had already won fame, both at home and abroad, with his brush and palette. His pastoral scenes had been awarded gold medals at local art exhibitions, and he had been admitted to the Paris Salon before he was twenty-five.



## CHAPTER IV.

### A COMEDY OF CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

Being of a Bohemian disposition and consequently fond of roaming about at all hours and in all places, Lucien had often met a pretty young girl while walking down Rue Royal to the Place d'Armes, invariably at the same time—eight o'clock in the morning. He had been attracted to the girl by her sweet face and modest demeanor and had woven quite a romance around her, wondering who she could be and where she could be going with such regularity every morning. She was always simply, yet neatly, dressed and wore hats which were neither new nor strikingly stylish: but the face beneath the hat was fresh, young and innocent, and Lucien was satisfied. She was evidently a working girl and he wondered where she could be employed. Of course he could easily have solved the problem by following the girl, for she was a brisk walker, and would not have suspected he was playing the detective; but such a course would have destroyed the charming romance he had made up in his mind about her and he contented himself with walking behind her for a block or two and then suddenly turning into a by-street, lest he should see her reach her destination, thus giving him a tangible clue to her identity.

One Sunday morning, Dumont's romance came very near going to pieces, like a house of cards.



It happened in a very commonplace manner. Lucien and Blanche were on their way to early Mass at the Cathedral St. Louis, when, in turning into Rue de Chartres, the young artist slightly collided with a lady. He courteously tipped his hat and apologized for his inattention.

"It is of no consequence, monsieur," observed the object of his awkwardness.

She bestowed upon him a gracious smile of forgiveness and his heart gave a great bound—it was his heroine, the little blonde he had met every week-day morning for the past six months. She was resplendent in her Sunday toggery and looked divinely pretty.

Just then, Blanche, who had heretofore been deeply engrossed in studying the structural intricacies of a gorgeous *chef d'oeuvre* of the milliner's art poised on the head of a lady in front of them, turned around just in time to see Lucien's bow and the girl's engaging smile.

"Why, I didn't know you were acquainted with little Lolotte?" she remarked, in surprise.

"Lolotte?" repeated Lucien "I don't know anybody by that name."

"Then why did you bow to her?"

"I did not bow to anyone."

"But I saw you, and she smiled very pleasantly too. How long have you known her, monsieur? I thought you had no secrets for me?"



She always called him "monsieur" when she was displeased with him.

"I am not hiding anything from you, my dear, I tell you that I don't know any Lolottes; that I bowed to no one, and assure you that my whole life is an open book, specially gotten up and illustrated for my darling sister's exclusive delectation "

Although really displeased, Blanche could not refrain from smiling. He was so ingenuous, that rogue of Lucien. But she would not let him escape, this time. The offense was too flagrant. He must explain or fall out with her.

"You are a grand rascal, a hypocrite, an *enjoleur*," she said, knitting her brows and trying to speak sternly, but unable to conceal her admiration. "I want you to distinctly understand, monsieur, that I will not let you pull the wool over my eyes, this time. I have been your dupe long enough. Keep your sophistries for Mademoiselle de St. Croix." Then, coaxingly: "Tell me, Lucien, where did you meet Lolotte?"

"I have never met her, don't want to meet her, and hope I never will," answered Lucien, dejectedly.

He felt ill at ease under his sister's earnest scrutiny. He had a vague premonition that explanations would lead to embarrassing revelations. Blanche had the knack of generally getting what she wanted out of him, either by catechising him or by persistent pouting, and he would have to confess all about his roamings and shadowings when he encountered the little blonde. He had a horror of being thought ridiculous. Blanche would laugh at him,



call him a goose, tantalize him, and would ever afterward have a formidable weapon to fall back upon whenever she would want any special favors from him. He resolved to deny everything.

They had now reached Rue St. Pierre, half a block from the Cathedral.

Blanche renewed the attack.

"Don't be a goose," she said. "I saw you bow; I saw the girl smile as she has never done before, and am sure there is a good understanding between you two. Confess, now, like a good fellow?"

"I have nothing to confess," answered the artist, doggedly.

They were at the church door. Lucien gave a sigh of relief.

"Have it your way, you surly bear," said Blanche, in tones of deep reproach; "but after Mass is over"—and she gave a significant toss of her dainty head and Lucien knew she had not surrendered, but would renew hostilities at the first opportunity.

"Let us take a seat in one of the side aisles," said Lucien. "See, our pew is full."

Blanche looked in the direction of the pew and saw there were already four persons in it.

"I forgot to lock it last evening," she explained. "It is annoying, but it would be so rude to put those people out"

Fate was evidently playing ducks and drakes with Lucien that morning. No sooner had he said his prayers and seated himself comfortably in the pew, waiting for the



services to begin, than Blanche leaned over and whispered to him:

"Don't make out you haven't seen her. I understand now why you did not take a seat in the main aisle." And then she added, convincingly: "You certainly bowed to her this morning."

She turned her attention to her prayer book. Lucien looked about the church with feelings of nervous trepidation. Blanche was evidently watching him from the corner of her eye, for she again leaned over and whispered:

"She is in the second pew in front. You know it, you hypocrite."

Dumont looked. Sure enough, in the second pew in front of them, demurely knelt the innocent cause of his predicament. The chain of circumstantial evidence against him was certainly overwhelming.

Lucien was neither an attentive nor a devout worshipper that morning. Blanche afterwards told him that he had read the Credo for the Gospel, had held his book upside down during the Gloria and that she had to nudge him several times before he knelt at the Elevation. But the writer does not vouch for this. Blanche was such a great tease, that it was probably a mere imaginative accusation, prompted by a desire for malicious vengeance.

To Lucien's intense relief, Blanche rose to go immediately after the services were over.

"Now, monsieur, you must confess," she said, when they reached the street. "I will take no excuse."

Lucien preserved a gloomy silence.



"My beloved brother is neither amiable nor communicative," resumed Blanche: "but he must confess. When how, and where did you meet Lolotte?"

"Never, in no manner, and at no place."

"Then why did you bow to her?"

"I did not."

"But you did. I saw you with my own eyes."

"It was an optical illusion."

He was laughing now, amused by her earnestness.

"It must have been a pre-arranged illusion, for she played her role to perfection," said Blanche, with biting sarcasm. "And I who thought Lolotte a little saint, with her baby face and bashfulness!"

Dumont's chivalrous nature was aroused.

"You are uncharitable, Blanche," he said, reprovingly.

"It is your fault, monsieur."

He flushed, but said nothing. With a woman's quick intuition, she saw his weak point and took advantage of it.

"A gentleman should so shape his conduct," she said, icily, "that his lady friends should be above criticism."

Lucien felt he was lost. He knew he would never have a moment's peace until he pacified his sister. He was about to explain everything, when the little blonde passed by, in her usual brisk and hurried manner. He glanced at the apparition. The apparition looked in his direction.

"Bonjour!" he heard the rosy lips murmur.

Blanche nodded and Lucien mechanically tipped his hat. It was all over in a second. The apparition vanished around the corner, leaving the artist mystified and bewil-



dered. He glanced at his sister. Her face was beaming with triumphant satisfaction.

"I thought you did not know Lolotte?" she said, tauntingly.

Lucien made no reply. He was utterly crushed. He kept his eyes riveted to the ground and they walked home in silence.

To Lucien's astonishment, Blanche did not renew the attack. He could hardly believe his senses, for, whenever she wanted to know anything, she generally persevered until she carried her point. And, strangest of all, she did not seem in the least displeased with him. At breakfast she helped him liberally to his favorite dishes and put an extra slice of *pain perdu* on his plate, knowing his fondness for the delicious sweetbread. Could he have read what was going on in his sister's mind, he would no longer have been mystified. Women are a thousand times cleverer than men and when it comes to a duel of *finesse* and strategy, she can easily outwit the boasted lord of creation before he is aware of it. Lucien never for a moment imagined that his sister was planning to outgeneral him, scheming to discover what she thought was a great secret he was keeping from her. The only thing which occupied his thoughts was: Why had the girl said "Bonjour!" as she passed by? He had met her a hundred times before and she had seemingly never noticed him.

In the afternoon, Lucien went to his sister's room, as was his custom, to kiss her good-bye.

"Will you be home for dinner?" she asked.



"Certainly not. Sunday is my day off, you know."

"Where will you dine?"

There was a tinge of suspicion in her voice.

"At the St. Croixs."

"To please Gaston de St. Croix or for the enchanting smiles of his sister?"

"Neither: it's just to get away from home cooking, that's all."

"Didn't you take dinner there last Sunday?"

"Yes."

"And Sunday before last?"

"Yes."

"And probably fifty-two Sundays preceding?"

"Possibly, but not probably. Why this catechism?"

"I was just thinking that for a man who does not intend to marry, you seem to be very fond of other peoples' dinners; I was also thinking that if Mlle. de St. Croix knew what I know, you would probably and possibly dine with someone else every Sunday hereafter. — Kiss your sister good-bye now."

And before he had time to say anything, she had pushed him in the hallway and closed and locked the door.



## CHAPTER V.

### THE ADVENT OF THE SERPENT.

New Orleans, in the beginning of the last century was a miniature Paris in customs and morals, The spirit of Americanism was slow in asserting itself, the natural tendency of its people, inherited from the Latin races of Europe, being antagonistic to modern ideas and innovations. Even more than half a century after the purchase of the Province of Louisiana by the United States, New Orleans was essentially French, still retaining the bubbling frivolity, the love of pleasure and the chivalry of the followers of Bienville, Iberville and De Soto.

The Carnival season of 1826 was at its height. It was five o'clock in the evening in care-free New Orleans. Shopkeepers were putting up their shutters and seeing that door fastenings were secure and windows properly bolted. For even at that early time, when the quaint town was hardly out of its swadling clothes, the gay season attracted to its hospitable doors the errant shop-lifter and burglar, and one could not be too careful.

The life of the city moved on: the world of Vanity Fair, daintily dressed, returning home from shopping;



tipsy men, noisy and insolent; *Cadiens* from Bayou Teche ; women with bold eyes, gaudily gowned, and flirting right and left with sauntering gallants; gay cavaliers, with leering faces, strutting arrogantly about, ready to do homage to every fair dame under the sun, Christian, pagan or barbarian; hot-headed Creoles, alert for a quarrel, ready to slap a face or send a challenge at the slightest provocation; carriages rolling by; shouts, songs, curses.

Lucien Dumont, artist and dreamer, easy-going man of the world and enthusiastic admirer of that glorious afterthought of the Creator, woman, stood with his back against a post at the corner of Canal and Bourbon streets, puffing a cigar and lazily watching the boisterous crowd.

The sky had been hidden by dark, lowering clouds all day. No rain had fallen, but it had been too dark to permit Dumont to work in his studio. So, as was his custom when not painting, he had gone out for a stroll about town, to loaf, smoke and ogle the pretty girls.

Presently, an omnibus came lumbering by and stopped at the corner to take a few passengers.

"I might just as well go home," thought Dumont. "It must be dinner-time and Blanche will scold like blazes if I keep her waiting. I wish the little tyrant would get in the habit of taking dinner without me. I can picture her waiting at the top of the stairs for me, with her head cocked on one side and her finger held up threateningly, ready to pounce upon me like a tigress. Talk about your hen-pecked husbands! Why, they are in clover, compared with the existence I lead. I think I'll rebel and throw off the yoke. I'll



begin by not showing up for dinner today.

But he proved his inconsistency by ingloriously climbing into the omnibus and taking the only vacant seat left. The driver was about to start, when a young girl signaled to him.

"I don't think there is any room," said the driver, surlily. "You had better take the next omnibus, miss."

"But I live in Bayou Road and the next omnibus only goes as far as the Cabildo," protested the girl. "It will be half an hour before the Bayou Road omnibus starts. I am small and do not take up much room."

Then she added, wearily: "I am so tired."

The dialogue had attracted the attention of the passengers and Dumont craned his neck to get a look at the new comer. In an instant he was on his feet, hat in hand. He had recognized the girl his sister called Lolotte.

"There is room, and plenty of it," he said, cheerily. "Take my seat, mademoiselle. I can sit on the roof."

The young girl drew back.

"But, monsieur, I cannot permit it. It might rain and you would be drenched."

"I have an umbrella," urged Lucien. "I have but a short distance to go.—Allow me, mademoiselle."

He alighted from the vehicle and courteously made way for her to pass. She hesitated, but his smile was so engaging, so respectful, that she stepped in and took the proffered seat. Lucien was about to ascend to the roof, when she gently placed a detaining hand on his arm.



"Pardon, monsieur," she said, timidly, "but there is a seat for you here. See," and she edged away a little, "we are both slim and do not require much room."

Then, as if abashed by her boldness in thus addressing a total stranger, she blushed furiously and made matters worse by saying :

"But you need not take the seat, if you prefer the roof, monsieur."

Lucien looked at the space the slender finger had indicated, at the roof of the omnibus, at the sky, from which large rain-drops were now pattering down ; then, looking into the girl's crimson face, said, in his softest tones ;

"I thank you very much, mademoiselle. I will take the seat."

He took care not to brush too close against her as he sat beside her. The driver, who had not dared to show his impatience — for the young men of that period had awful tempers — cracked his whip and the vehicle lumbered creakily away.

Poor little Lolotte ! Like a frightened child, she kept down her eyes, not daring to look at the young man beside her. She was a poor working-girl, more used to gruff treatment and reproaches than to courteous attention, and she could hardly understand why such a stylishly-dressed gentleman should treat her with such marked consideration.

"You look tired, little one."

She started and her heart almost stopped beating. How



musical his voice sounded ! She looked up timorously and fixed her big, baby-like eyes upon his handsome face.

"It is the same every evening, monsieur," she said, simply, being reassured by the expression of friendly solicitude in the face of the young cavalier. "A poor girl has to work hard to keep the wolf from the door."

Lucien looked at the faded calico dress and the shabby old-fashioned hat, and a feeling of genuine compassion took possession of him.

"Do you have to work very hard?" he asked.

"Not so very hard, monsieur : but it is so wearisome to be shut up all day in a musty room from eight in the morning till five in the evening, with never a chance to go out into the sunshine and see the busy world. I am not the only one, monsieur. It is the life-story of millions of wage-earners in this great world of ours."

Dumont kept looking at the girl as she rattled off her philosophic little speech. How droll she was, this slip of humanity, hardly more than a child. She talked to him without restraint, as one would to a big brother or to one's father-confessor. She was decidedly charming and the adventure was getting more interesting every minute.

"Where do you work, little one?"

"I trim bonnets and make capes for Madame Vachonette, the *grande modiste*," she naively answered. "Do you know her, monsieur?"

Madame Vachonette? Why, she was a tenant of his



and kept the millinery shop in the ground-floor corner-room of his ancestral home ; but he took good care not to impart this information to his companion.

"No," he answered, amused at the oddity of the question. "I never have occasion to have my hats trimmed, you know ; and I don't wear capes."

She smiled at the pleasantry and was about to reply, when the omnibus came to a sudden stop and a young man dressed in the garb of a laborer, who was seated on the roof, leaned over the side of the vehicle and cried out :

"Your corner, Mam'zelle Lolotte."

The girl immediately arose.

"It's a good thing that Pierre was there," she observed, gaily. "I had completely forgotten that I was nearing home. Adieu, monsieur — and many thanks."

She made a curtsy which would have done honor to a marchioness. But Lucien was as quick as she. In a minute he had alighted from the omnibus and stood waiting with open umbrella at the door.

"It is raining and you have no umbrella," he observed. "Let me escort you to your door."

Like one in a dream, she took his proffered arm, and they trudged through the rain in silence. When they reached the girl's home, Lucien noticed a man slouch by, stop irresolutely, then veer suddenly around and disappear in the gathering darkness. Instinctively, Lucien placed his hand on the hilt of his sword. The girl saw the hostile demonstration and laughingly said :



## THE ADVENT OF THE SERPENT.

“Don't be alarmed, monsieur. It's only Pierre ”

“Pierre?” interrogated Lucien. “And who is Pierre? He comes and goes like a Will-'o-the-Wisp.”

The girl lowered her eyes.

“He is my fiancé,” she replied. “We are to be married in the fall.” Then she added, joyously: “And he will take me away from that stuffy old shop and he says I won't have to work any more after we are married. Pierre is a fine workman. He expects to be made foreman next month. Oh, but it will be grand — not a thing to do all day but the house work and play the *grande dame*.” Then, recollecting herself: “But I am keeping you in the rain. What a chatter-box you must think I am. — Adieu, monsieur.”

She tendered him her hand.

“Not adieu, but *au revoir*,” he said, closing the umbrella and handing it to her. “Keep this until we meet again. It might rain in the morning.”

She protested.

“But you — ”

“The rain has stopped. I am wet to the skin anyhow. All the time you were talking, the weeping heavens were using the back of my neck for an outlet. I could not be wetter if I were to be dipped sixty-nine consecutive times in the Mississippi River.”

He was laughing and she thought him the most charming man she had ever met. She could hardly believe she



was not dreaming. He was like those knights of old she had read about in story-books and fairy tales. To be amiable and jovial when wet to the skin, was beyond her comprehension. Pierre would have fumed and fussed and grumbled—

“Good-night, little one.”

Her dream was at an end.

“Good-night,” monsieur.”

He tipped his hat and was walking away, when he suddenly thought of his meeting with the little milliner that eventful Sunday morning. He retraced his steps.

“We have met before, I believe?” he half-questioned.

Lolotte looked at the speaker with sincere wonder.

“Not that I remember, monsieur. I never notice people in the street, unless I know they don’t mind a working-girl’s greeting. The world is cruel to the poor, monsieur.—What makes you think we have met before this evening?”

Could she have forgotten? Lucien’s vanity was piqued. No matter how free from conceit a man may be, he always feels assured that the woman he admires is forever thinking about him. It is human nature the world over.

“Merely a fancy,” he answered, carelessly. “I meet so many pretty girls, you know,” he added, gallantly. “Good-night, little one.”

“Good-night, monsieur.”



He walked briskly away. She stood on the steps, listening to his footfalls on the reverberating plank-walk; and as they gradually died away in the distance, mingling with the noises of the night, a strange feeling of loneliness overcame her. She felt like calling him back to hear him speak to her once more; he was so interesting, so entertaining, so chivalrous. And even when her thoughtlessness had been the cause of his being drenched while he walked like a hero in the rain and slush, he had never for a moment shown the slightest displeasure. On the contrary, he seemed to think it was a good joke on him. Suppose he would catch pneumonia and die? At this dire thought, tears came to her eyes and she silently entered her home, wondering why she felt so strange and weak, why her heart throbbed so fast and loud.



## CHAPTER VI.

### SWEET REVERIES.

For the first time, Lolotte found her home cheerless and bare. Strange that she had not noticed before how shabby the parlor furniture looked, with its horse-hair covering eaten away in a hundred places, and the fringes hanging down almost to the floor, like enormous cobwebs. And the unpainted pine table in the next room --- where her big four-posted bed was and which served the double purpose of dining-room and sleeping apartment --- how ungainly, how shockingly repulsive it looked.

“ Lolotte, is that you ? ”

It was her mother's voice, coming from the third and last room of the cottage, where the meals of mother and daughter were daily prepared and cooked over a charcoal furnace, which served for both stove and fire-place.

“ Yes, mother, it is I.”

She stepped into the room.

“ In bed already? You are not ill, *petite mere*? ”

She kissed her mother on both cheeks and smoothed down the straggling grey hair.

“ No ; only tired. I washed all the clothes and scrubbed



the parlor and your room and ripped your last year's brown dress, to make it over. It will look like a new dress."

"*Pauvre petite mere !*" said Lolotte, putting her arms affectionately around her neck. "This is too much in one day. You must indeed be tired."

"You will find your supper on the table. The coffee is by the fire, but you'll have to warm the meat. — Pierre is late to-night."

Pierre? Oh, yes. She had forgotten all about him. Why had he not come in, as was his custom? He was no doubt up to some trick and was probably hiding in the parlor or in the shadow of the porch, whence he would suddenly come out to give her a good scare. This was his favorite joke, which he repeated three or four times a week and she was quite used to it --- but she would invariably make out she was terribly frightened and run away screaming, to the consternation of her mother, who could never accustom herself to the humoristic pranks of her future son-in-law.

Lolotte went to the parlor door and looked in.

"Pierre, you big baby, come out. I know you're hiding behind the sofa."

No answer. She looked behind every piece of furniture; no Pierre. She opened the door and peered into the street. Nothing save complete darkness and the noise of the rain-water dripping from the roof.

"I wonder where he is? I'll leave the door unlocked."

She closed the door and went back into her mother's room. The poor soul was sound asleep.

"*Pauvre petste mere,*" she said, kissing her lightly on



the forehead. "You have only a few months of hard work now. When Pierre and I are married, you will be queen of our little home."

She took the steaming coffee-pot and brought it to her room, where she poured its contents into her cup — a big, unwieldy piece of crockery, a present from Pierre, with "Forget me not" written in German text upon its sides and which she had to hold with both hands when filled to the brim. But it pleased Pierre to see her using it every day, and to please Pierre had been her heart's desire since the day she had promised to marry him.

She sat at the table and contemplated her frugal supper. There was a single slice of bread, not very thick, and of the baking of the preceding day, for her mother had been ailing of late and the doctor had ordered a tonic which had taken nearly all their ready cash ; there was also some Gruyere cheese and a tiny veal cutlet, breaded and tempting, and the brim-full cup of coffee she had just poured out. But she did not eat. She rested her elbow on the table, leaned her cheek against the palm of her hand, and thought over her adventure of the evening and the kindness and chivalrous courtesy of the handsome stranger.

"Perhaps he is a nobleman?" she mused. "He carried a sword and was dressed in the height of fashion."

She thought how wonderful it was that such a high born gentleman should have troubled himself about the comfort of a poor, ill-dressed working-girl. And the omnibus was full of nice people, too, some of whom nodded to him in friendly greeting or shook his hand as they passed by. He



had said "You look tired, little one," in a tone that was almost caressing, yet in such a respectful manner, that she never for a second thought of feeling offended. Poor little soul, she had never been spoken to with such sweetness and deference before, and the events of the evening seemed to her like a dream, like a page from a story-book, where the heroes are always gallant and the heroines happy and beautiful. She had forgotten her supper; forgotten that she was tired; that her arms were smarting from having tried to make a hat fit exactly as a capricious customer wanted; that her head was aching and her heart almost in despair at the scantiness of her wages, hardly sufficient to keep herself decently dressed and buy the bare necessities of life for the household. She had forgotten all things — save the smiling face and honeyed words of the handsome stranger, whose kindness and attentions were beyond her comprehension.

There was a knock at the parlor door, but she did not hear it. A louder knock, then another, still louder; but her reverie was deep and entrancing and she was deaf to all worldly sounds. The door slowly opened and a head was cautiously thrust through the opening. The survey seemed to satisfy the owner of the head, for he stepped inside, softly closed the door and walked up to the table where the young girl was seated. And she, unconscious of his presence, sat like a statue—her elbow on the table, her cheek against the palm of her hand, her supper cold and untasted, thinking of the handsome cavalier, of his gallantry, of the radiant ray of sunshine he had shed into her lonesome life.



## CHAPTER VII.

### DISCORD.

“ Well, my fine lady, since you get yourself escorted home by aristocrats, you don’t welcome old friends any more.”

It was Pierre’s voice. The entrancing dream came to a suddentermination. Lolotte started to her feet.

“ Oh, Pierre, how you frightened me ! How long have you been here ? I have been looking everywhere for you.”

“ You couldn’t have looked very hard. I’ve been standing right here for over ten minutes.”

Lolotte looked up in surprise. He had never spoken to her so gruffly before. Could he have been drinking ?

“ What is the matter, Pierre ?” she said going close to him, so that she would detect the smell of liquor, if he had been drinking. “ You are as surly as a bear.” Then, playfully : “ Kiss your little Lolotte, *mon cheri*.”

She held up her rosy lips to him, but he did not move.

“ Who is that fellow who took you home tonight ?” he asked, surlily.



The girl fell into a chair and burst into a merry laugh.

"He is jealous--desperately," she exclaimed, amused by his frowning and gloomy looks. "And I who thought he had lost his job or that something terrible had happened."

She went to him and put her arms around his neck.

"You big, overgrown baby," she said, "don't you know that your Lolotte cares only for you in this cranky old world?"

Her pretty blonde curls brushed against his fat, red face; but he did not stir.

"Who is that fellow? Can't you answer?"

His voice was harsh and threatening, and so unlike the tone in which he generally addressed her, that she took her arms from around his neck and stood mutely looking at him.

"Who is he, I say?"

She drew back in alarm.

"I — I don't know, Pierre."

"You lie," he exclaimed, furiously. "Didn't I see you talking and laughing with him in the omnibus? You didn't know I was seated by the driver and could see everything that was going on inside. You must take me for an idiot."

Lolotte gazed vacantly at her lover. She had never seen him in such a passion before and, being innocent of any wrongdoing, the suddenness and vehemence of the scene Pierre was making appalled her. She was yet



unlearned in the baser passions which beset humanity and was unaware of the momentous changes jealousy could work in the heart of man. She had yet to learn that it is a cancer which corrodes the purest hearts, embittering the mind, making liars, hypocrites and cowards of sin-cursed humanity.

Lolotte's silence angered Pierre still more.

"Do you refuse to tell me his name?" he said, advancing threateningly.

She retreated a few steps.

"Pierre, I swear —"

"I don't believe you," he interrupted, fiercely. "I'm no fool. You must tell me —"

He stopped short and his face became purple and white by turns. He had suddenly caught sight of the dainty silk umbrella leaning against the table. He took it in his hands and examined it.

"How did he come to forget this?" he asked.

"He left it for me to use in case it rained in the morning," faltered the girl, now really frightened.

"Very kind of him. — And where is the umbrella I gave you?"

"In the corner — there —"

And she pointed towards the armoire.

"Is it not good enough for you?"

"Y—Yes, Pierre. Please don't make a fuss and wake up mother. She is ill and worn out."

He did not seem to hear her, but sneeringly resumed:



“But mine is cotton; his is silk. Mine has a common wooden handle; his has an elegantly-carved gold head. Of course, since mademoiselle has branched out among the swells, cotton umbrellas won’t do. But she won’t use this one, for here goes —”

He took hold of the umbrella between his hands and brought it down with tremendous force against his knee. The frail handle snapped as if it had been made of glass and the silk cover was pierced in a dozen places by the bent and twisted ribs. He threw the wreck in the middle of the room.

“To the devil with him and everything belonging to him!” he exclaimed, trembling with passion.

“Pierre--- Pierre! --- what have you done!” cried Lolotte, aghast at his outburst of fury. “What shall I say to the gentleman when he calls for his umbrella?”

“So you expect him to call?” retorted Pierre, pacing up and down the room like a wild beast. “Just refer him to me. If he wants any indemnity, I’ll pay him — pay him with my fists, you hear? He may be an aristocrat, but I am of the people and I’ll spit on him as I would on a mangy cur. My father was a *Sans Culottes* and drank blood in cupfuls as it dripped from the guillotine and my creed is that all men are equal. Fine clothes and money do not make him my superior. The same God that made him made me: the same Hell that will hold me is good enough for him.”

“*Mon Dieu*, Pierre, what is the matter with you? You have not been — drinking?”



“No! I haven’t touched strong drinks since the day I became engaged to you. I keep my word and don’t go about fooling those who trust me and then make matters worse by lying. I don’t like that man, whoever he is. He does not mean any good by being attentive to a poor working-girl. I know them, these fine gentlemen.” He was calmer and continued, in a gentler tone: “If I did not love you, I would not care a snap—but you are mine and I want no scoundrelly blue stocking to come between us. You are too young, too innocent to understand certain things. Tell me, little girl, who is that man?”

His voice was low and coaxing.

“I swear by the Holy Virgin I don’t know.”

He again became furious.

“You don’t know? And you allow yourself to be seen home and talked to familiarly by people you don’t even know? I had a better opinion of you.”

Her lip trembled and tears came to her eyes.

“How mean you are,” she said, reproachfully. “I meant no harm. You know that since we were betrothed I have never paid even passing attention to any man.”

“I don’t know anything about that: I am not always by. When I am at work in the foundry, God knows what you do.—People don’t give expensive umbrellas for nothing!”

It was a brutal speech—but he was a man of the people, unused to fine phrases, and bluntly spoke what he thought; but she, more refined, more used to the upper world, felt the full force of his insinuation. She threw



herself upon the table and sobbed convulsively.

A woman's tears will win where everything else fails. It is inexplicable, but undeniable. They have made and unmade empires, caused revolutions, spurred men to deeds of heroism or to feats of foolhardy daring. Because a woman cried, Anthony threw away a world; because a woman's eyes became misty with those silent messengers from a wounded heart, Leander swam the Helespont, Paris defied the valorous Greeks, Maximillian lost an empire and his life. There is only one way to meet a woman's tears — unconditional surrender.

Had Lolotte taken issue with Pierre, the quarrel would have continued with increasing bitterness and violence: but she adopted woman's most formidable weapon — tears — and won.

Pierre stopped short in his frenzied walk.

"Don't— don't, Lolotte!" he exclaimed, going to her and caressing her. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I can't explain why, but I don't like that man and it gave me such a turn to see how you had allowed him such liberties. Of course you meant no harm, but it hurt me a heap."

She raised her limpid eyes to his face and said, reproachfully:

"If you had only waited and let me explain, we would have been spared this scene. I'm glad we didn't wake up mother. Let me see if she is comfortable."



She tip-toed as far as the door and peeped in.

“Poor dear, she is fast asleep,” she said, coming back into the room. “And now you must take a bite with me. We can eat and talk at the same time.”

Pierre looked at the meager repast.

“But there is hardly enough for you,” he protested.

“Oh, there’s plenty. There’s a great big cup of *café-au lait* — I’ll cut my piece of bread in half, slice off a bit of cheese and give you a tiny portion of my *cotelette*. Why, it will be a banquet fit for a king!”



## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE PROMISE.

Pierre was not hungry, having eaten his supper at his boarding-house before coming to Lolotte's: but he was afraid she would think he was still angry with her if he persisted in his declination. So he sat at the little oblong table and looked on while she warmed the coffee and meat and divided the bread and cheese into exactly similar pieces.

"Let us take some precautions," observed Lolotte. "You know what a pig you are. We can't afford another clean shirt this week."

She took a towel hanging from a nail in a corner near the washstand and tucked it under his chin, in lieu of napkin.

"Now," she said, her knife poised high in the air and her fork in the meat, "you are my guest and have the choice: Shall I give you the bone and take the meat or take the meat and give you the bone?"

"It's all the same to me," replied Pierre, holding out his plate. "I'm only a little bit hungry."

She cut off the bone and put it in his plate, laughing



all the while.

"What are you giggling about?" asked Pierre, for he saw she was having fun at his expense.

"You two-legged goose," she said, forgetting that no self-respecting goose had more than two legs, "don't you see it amounts to the same thing — You take the bone and I keep the meat, or I keep the meat and you take the bone? You are bound to get the bone any way. — Don't you see the point?"

"O, it's a joke, then?"

"Of course."

Then, seeing his look of profound perplexity :

"Don't you understand? It's easy."

And she laboriously dissected the witticism.

"Do you see the point now?"

"Yes — yes," observed Pierre, wondering where the joke came in. Then, finally, his slow wit grasped the meaning and he burst into a loud guffaw.

"Haw, haw, haw!" he roared. "It's a great joke — the best I've heard for a long time. I'll have to spring it on my land-lady. — Say it over, Lolotte, so I'll learn it right."

She did so and he repeated the words after her, as a child does when learning its A. B. C.'s.

They were both very gay during the humble meal. She told him all about her meeting with the handsome stranger, concealing nothing, even that he had



called her "Little One"—an admission which made poor Pierre wince, but he said nothing, not wishing to bring on another scene. The conversation then drifted to their plans for the future, when she would be his wife and would not have to work so hard to keep body and soul together.

"And when you are foreman of the shop," asked Lolotte, "will they raise your wages?"

„Of course. I'll get five dollars more a week."

"When do you expect to be promoted?"

"On the first of next month."

"And then you can put aside that extra \$5.00 a week, in addition to what you now save every week?"

"Yes, easily. My expenses will be the same, you know."

She made a rapid mental calculation:

"Five dollars more a week from the first week of next month to October, will make nearly one hundred and fifty dollars, in addition to what we have saved up already—"

"You mean what I have up?" interrupted Pierre, with mock-sarcasm.

"It's the same thing; it is for both of us. — Guess how much we have now?"

"Hanged if I know. I don't keep tab on the money I give you to save. Take me for a book-keeper?"

"Well, there's exactly one hundred and twenty dollars. I counted the money last Sunday. We'll have



about five hundred dollars altogether. This will be quite a respectable sum for two *pauvres diables* to begin house-keeping."

Pierre mechanically looked at the clock.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, reaching for his hat. "Half-past nine! Won't Mamitte scold should she wake up and find me here!"

He spoke in his old-time jovial way and kissed his sweetheart with customary tenderness. He walked as far as the door, stopped, hesitated and began nervously fumbling with his hat. With a woman's quick perception, Lolotte half-guessed what was going on in his mind.

"You want to ask me something," she said, kindly.

"Yes; but I am afraid to displease you."

"Oh no—we are good friends now. What is it, Pierre?"

His hat slipped from his restless hands and fell to the floor. He picked it up, put it on his head and stared to open the door.

"No—never mind. We are friends now and it's no use raking up old scores."

She placed a detaining hand on his arm.

"You *must* tell me, Pierre. I won't rest in peace if I know there's something troubling you."

He cautiously closed the door and said, sheepishly;

"It's for your own good, little girl, and our future



happiness. . . . . Promise me you'll never speak to that man again."

She looked into his anxious face, then kissed him.

"I promise, Pierre," she said, simply.

And she was sincere, for she really cared for her gruff lover, after the fashion of the people of her class. But the serpent had entered their Eden and the gleam of his yellow eyes had undermined its innocent happiness.



## CHAPTER IX.

### THE HYPOCRITE

Dumont tried to slip into the house without being seen by his sister, but she came to the head of the stairs as soon as she heard the noise made by the opening of the creaky hall door, and stood waiting for him as he came up the steps.

“How late you are, Lucien ! I thought some accident had happened to you. I have kept dinner waiting until the soup has simmered down to a few cupfulls and the meats are unfit to eat. — Where have you been, sir ?”

She tried to grasp him by the sleeve as he passed by, but he adroitly eluded her. She ran after him, indignant.

“Don’t touch me, Blanche !” he desperately exclaimed, for he knew he would be lost if she felt how wet he was.

Blanche was dumbfounded.

“Lucien, come here this minute and explain your extraordinary conduct. Is that the way to greet your sister, who has been worrying herself sick about you and dying of hunger while waiting for you to put in an appearance ?” Then, as if a sudden gleam of intelligence had enlightened her: “I thought you had resigned from the *Cercle des*



*Sans Soucis*? You had promised to do so."

The *Cercle des Sans Soucis* (Care-Free Club) was one of the exclusive social organizations of the period, the resort of men of wealth and leisure, who spent their time in gambling, drinking and carousing. To please his sister, Lucien had tendered his resignation and joined the *Cercle des Artists* (Artists' Club), a more refined institution.

"No, I have not been dissipating," he hastened to say, reading his sister's thoughts. "I lost my umbrella and got caught in the rain. I'm soaking wet and didn't want to soil your dress."

Blanche's displeasure instantly vanished.

"You will catch your death of a cold," she cried, in alarmed tones, going to him and feeling his clothes. "How in the world could you get so wet? Go at once to your room and put on dry clothes. I'll ring for Labiche."

Glad of an opportunity to escape so easily, Lucien hurried to his room, where he was soon joined by Labiche, his body servant. With the assistance of his valet, he was soon comfortably clad in dry garments, and sought his sister with the feeling that he had avoided both Scylla and Charybdis with the skill of an expert navigator.

The *tete-a-tete* between brother and sister was as cordial as usual. They were both ravenously hungry and talked very little during the meal; but after the slaves had cleared the table and the young people were sipping their *cafe-noir*, Blanche remarked, half-questioningly:

"I can't understand your imprudence in risking yourself in such a rain. You deserve a good scolding,



monsieur."

"But I did not want to keep you waiting," replied the hypocrite, "I know how you worry when I am late."

"You could easily have sent for the carriage. Any gamln would have taken your message for a few cents."

"I never thought of it," replied Lucien.

"But then, you could also have taken the omnibus which passes right in front of our door?"

"One only thinks of those things afterwards," ventured Lucien, afraid to commit himself. Then he thought best to make some sort of explanation, and resumed; "You see, I was chatting at the *Cercle des Artists* with Millistoon, Guoneuille and Chainarre, and other harmless fellows, and never noticed how rapidly time was flying. I esently looked at the clock and saw it was almost six. 'Well, I must now leave this pleasant company,' I said. 'We dine at six and my little sister will beat me black and blue if I am a second late.' Millistoon nudged Guoneuille and laughed aloud. 'His sister! It's a good one, eh Guoneuille?' And Guoneuille poked Chainarre in the ribs and said: 'What do you think about it, Chainarre?' Chainarre put aside his pipe, and in that deliberate way he has of expressing himself, drawlingly replied: 'It is my firm and unbiased opinion that it is someone else's sister.' They all roared and I escaped from that den of iniquity and came directly to my darling little Sis. --- Give your prodigal brother a hug!"

He affectionately took her in his arms and she never for a moment doubted the truthfulness of his explanation. She was very proud of her big brother and overlooked



many of his failings, attributing them to eccentricity. "He is a genius," she would argue; "he has to be different from other men." And he, sly hypocrite, knew her weak point was her fondness for him, and he always managed to extricate himself from any predicament by the judicious use of what we call "blarney" in this prosaic age. The mythical conversation at the *Cercle*, was made up to demonstrate to her that, wherever he could be, she was always foremost in his thoughts. He adored his sister and would not have caused her pain for the world. He knew that if she were told the truth about his flirtations and his carousals with Millistoon, Guoneuille and Chainarre, she would naturally be horrified and unhappy. So, he adopted the plan of harmless deceit which could possibly hurt no one and which assured his sister's happiness. And, that evening, when Lucien left to go to the *Cercle*, Blanche never thought of asking him how it was that he had taken nearly an hour to reach home after leaving the club: and he, like a truthful and dutiful brother, neglected to inform her that he had passed right in front of their door in the very omnibus she had wondered he had *not* taken and had trudged home in the rain and through mire and slush from the limits of the City, where gentle Lolotte, the pretty shop girl, had her humble home.



## CHAPTER X.

### THE ABSINTHE DRINKERS.

“ Ah, here comes Dumont ! Another absinthe, Zozo.”

And the speaker, Maxime Millistoon, put down his glass and made an imperious sign to his companions. Two glasses filled with the pale-green liquor, which were about to be conveyed to parched and expectant lips, were instantly placed back on the table.

“ No, thank you; no more absinthe for me,” laughed Dumont. “ Bring a flagon of vermouth, Zozo.” Then, sinking his voice to a whisper; “ I’ve got to stop, boys. When I got home last night, I found a pink cat with green tail and flaming eyes sitting on my bed.”

“ I don’t like to say it,” observed Millistoon, “ but for the past three nights I have been escorted home by a two-headed rhinoceros and a white giraffe.”

“ Since we are exchanging veracious confidences,” put in Guoneuille, solemnly, “ I’ll confess that every night an elephant sits on my chest, blowing in my face through his trunk and vanishing only at sunrise.”

Chainarre looked successively at each of his companions and laboriously drawled out:



"These are merely the preliminary stages. I have been through all of them."

And while they sipped their liquor, he graphically recounted what he had gone through, to Guoneuille's envy, Millistoon's admiration and Dumont's amusement.

The young men were in a private room of Papa Frimoose's cafe, popularly known to this day as "The Old Absinthe House," one of the toniest and most frequented places of its kind in pleasure-loving New Orleans in the beginning of the last century. The revelers were Maxime Millistoon, Emile Guoneuille, Jules Chainarre and Lucien Dumont, high livers and "all around sports" of that profligate period. They were habitués of the place, invariably came together and were looked upon by Papa Frimoose as lineal descendants of Croesus, for they always called for the best and paid the score without hesitation or haggling.

Millistoon presently reached for his glass. Finding it empty, he contemptuously flung it across the room and lustily cried out:

"Papa Frimoose—Papa Frimoose! Come here, you licensed robber! Do you think we never get thirsty?"

And he thumped the table with his fist so vigorously, that the glasses rattled and the flagon of vermouth fell to the floor and was shattered into fragments.

Papa Frimoose came running in, followed by zozo, the *garçon*.

"That is nothing, messieurs," he exclaimed, pointing to the scattered pieces of glass. "Zozo, come here immediately and take out this trash. — What can I do for



the gallant gentlemen?"

And he howed and smirked and wiped the table with his napkin, while Zozo picked up and carried away the broken glass. Millistoon glared savagely at old Frimoose.

"You vile decoctor of poisonous dregs," he said, "what do you mean by letting us die of thirst? Three absinthes and," he added, facetiously, pointing to Dumont, "ask her ladyship what she wants. She has seceded."

"Vermouth frappé," said Lucien, laughing.

"And be lively about it or we'll twist your villainous neck," added Guoneuille, ominously.

"Yes — Yes, my fine gentlemen. — Right away."

The old fellow almost ran to execute the order and returned in a few minutes with decanters and glasses.

"Anything else I can do to please the noble cavaliers?"

"Yes," replied Guoneuille; "go to the devil."

"An excellent idea," put in Dumont.

"Nothing would please us better," added Millistoon.

"What do you think about it, Chainarre?"

Chainarre took a long pull at his pipe, deliberately puffed the smoke in Papa Frimoose's face and solemnly said:

"It is my firm and unprejudiced opinion that the old reprobate is an eye-sore to the immediate surroundings, and that the sooner he vanishes, the better will it be for our comfort and sanctity. — *Messieurs, a votre sante!*"

And he drained his glass to the last drop and immediately began preparing another drink from the array of bottles in front of him.

Papa Frimoose looked on smilingly and walked toward



the wine-room, his head bobbing up and down, as if on springs.

“What a jolly quartette!” he observed as if speaking to himself, but loud enough to be heard by the group. “It does my old heart good to see such gaiety and innocent mirth. Would that all our young men were as gentlemanly and noble-hearted!”

He cast a side-glance at the boon companions as he went out of the room, to see the effect of his eulogium; but the revelers were busy investigating and sampling the contents of the numerous bottles grouped about the table and had not even heard



## CHAPTER XI.

### THE PLOT THAT FAILED .

The Saturday following Lucien's meeting with Lolotte near the St. Louis Cathedral, as he was about leaving for a noon-day stroll, Blanche met him in the hall and said:

"Would you mind doing me a small favor, Lucien?"

The young artist smiled and said, knowingly:

"A box of gloves against a kiss that I guess?"

"You've lost already. You'll *never* guess."

"Easiest thing in the world --- you want me to take you to vespers this evening? All right, Sis, it goes."

"You goose, there are no vespers on Saturdays."

"Well, then, it's a promenade on the levee?"

"After all those heavy rains? No, thank you."

"A visit to the poor of the parish to-morrow?"

"We did so two weeks ago. Guess again."

"I give up. What is it, Sis?"

"I want to make an errand boy of you."

"A billet doux to some future brother-in-law?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Lucien. You know we have both vowed never to marry. We must be the last of our race."

Poor girl! She spoke heedlessly, to tease her brother.



If she could have lifted the veil which conceals the future from mortal gaze, she would have seen how prophetic her words, so lightly uttered, were destined to be.

“Well, what is it?” observed Lucien, “You’ve won.

“I want you to stop down stairs and tell Madame Vachonette not to forget to send my hat this evening. I want to wear it to church to-morrow. — Will you, dear?”

Blanche had been planning this *coup de theatre* for almost a week and there was a look of triumphant expectation in her beaming features as she intently watched her brother’s face. The shock was great and unexpected; but Lucieu had knocked about the world too long to be caught by his sister’s ingenuous strategy. His embarrassment was over in a second. He coolly smoothed out a crease in his gloves and pleasantly answered :

All right, Sis. Anything else?”

She thought she detected a slight flush in his averted face, but it was dark in the hallway and she was not certain. She felt disappointed, but gaily said:

“No, nothing else, dear — except mygloves.”

Dumont walked down the stairs in a decidedly perturbed state of mind.

“I wonder if she suspects anything?” he thought. “It’s a confoundedly funny errand on which to send a man of my dlgnity, when the house is full of slaves, who spend their time watching the spiders spin their



webs'.'

He stepped into the little shop and delivered his sister's message to Madame Vachonette and walked out without even glancing in the direction of the little back parlor. He was afraid he would see Lolotte and betray himself. Yet, even if he had looked, he would not have seen her, for she had seen him enter the shop and had fled behind a portiere, trembling in every limb, as if a wild beast had suddenly appeared before her.



## CHAPTER XII.

### THE TEMPTER.

Saturday evening in crowded Canal Street.

The minute hand of the big clock in front of Frouce et Freres's jewelry store was slowly moving in the direction of XII., while the hour hand seemed to have stopped for all eternity just before reaching V.—at least so thought Lucien Dumant, whose impatient scrutiny of the clock was becoming more eager every minute. At last, there was a whirl of mechanism and 5 o'clock slowly pealed forth from the sonorous chimes and merchants, clerks and shop-girls began their daily rush for home and rest. It was a bewildering sea of ever-changing faces, enough to puzzle the keenest eyes; but in that mass of faces, Lucien soon discerned one which sent the blood rushing through his veins with increased vitality and he darted through the jostling crowd.

“Good evening, mademoiselle.”

A pair of frightened blue eyes met his admiring gaze, but were instantly lowered to the ground. The little blonde head made a feeble nod and the girl tried to pass by.

Lucien smilingly barred the way.



"I cannot permit you to run away like this," he said, thinking she was hurrying to catch the omnibus. "I am going in your direction. If the omnibus is full, we'll take a carriage."

She had backed toward the wall and was leaning against it, trembling and powerless. The crowd surged by, heedless of the drama in real life being enacted in the busy street.

"You are ill, little one," he said, kindly.

"No—no!" she faltered. "I—I am only tired, that's all. It will be over in a minute."

"Poor little one," he said, compassionately. Then, noticing how pale and weak she was: "You are too ill to ride in the omnibus. Let me see you home."

He gently took hold of her arm. She had not the strength to resist and before she had realized what she was doing, she was seated beside the stranger in a carriage.

"Bayou Road and Tremé," said Dumont to the driver.

A few blocks before reaching its destination, the carriage was stopped in a narrow street by a blockade, caused by a fractious horse and stopped near the gutter's edge. Lucien poked out his head to see what was the matter and a young mechanic who was passing by, stopped suddenly, gazed fixedly at him and then, as if impelled by some resistless impulse, walked to the carriage and looked in. As his eyes met those of the shrinking girl inside, his face became livid and he tottered like a drunken man. Just then the carriage started to go, but the hot-headed young Creole jumped to his feet and shouted to the driver:



"Stop instantly! I never saw such brazen insolence. I'll teach that lout a lesson he'll not forget in a hurry."

He was about to spring from the carriage, when Lolotte frantically grasped his arm.

"For God's sake leave him alone!," she cried, almost in his arms, in her eagerness to hold him back. "It's Pierre, my fiance."

Lucien gently pushed the girl from him and motioned to the driver to proceed.

"I forgive him for your sake, little one," he said, in the soft tones he always used when addressing her. "With all due respect to the gentleman, however, it strikes me that he has shockingly bad manners. He needs drastic lessons in etiquette."

The girl, now really ill, made no response. She knew that Pierre would never forgive her. He would believe that she had purposely lied to him the previous evening and would hate and despise her.

"Here we are, mademoiselle."

Lucien's voice aroused her from her painful train of thoughts. He helped her to alight, then waited, hat in hand.

Lolotte looked apprehensively down the street.

"Please go, monsieur," she pleaded. "If Pierre should come and find you here, he'll make a terrible scene."

"This is a splendid argument to induce me to remain," remarked Lucien, with suave sarcasm. "I am something of a volcano myself."

"But, monsieur, think of the scandal! You are too honorable to compromise an unprotected girl."



The appeal to his honor won.

“All right, little one; I’ll obey. May I call to-morrow?”

“Yes—any time you wish. Please go, monsieur.”

She pushed him into the carriage, then said, as an after-thought :

“Do not come tomorrow. It is Pierre’s day. Come Monday evening. Go, now — quick.!”

She stood on the steps and watched the carriage as it slowly disappeared from sight, thoughtful and sad, her heart filled with dread, her happiness forevermore clouded.

And the serpent blinked his yellow eyes and hissed contentedly, delighted at the havoc he had wrought.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### BROTHER AND SISTER.

"How do you like my new hat?"

Lucien was standing in front of the mirror in his room engaged in the arduous task of fixing a wobbling tie, and saw the smiling face of his sister reflected in the glass."

"Fine — fine," he answered, without turning his head.

"Lucien! How can you say so without even looking at it."

"I can see it in the glass. It's beautiful."

By this time the rebellious cravat had been conquered and he turned around and faced his sister.

"Why, Blanche, it's a stunner. It is the prettiest hat you ever wore. Let me see how it looks in the back."

But she did not move.

"You are a bear—a brute, like all brothers," she said, petulantly.

"Why, what's the matter now? It's the grandest hat—"

"Hush, you hypocrite!" interrupted Blanche, indignantly. "I wanted to test your powers of observation and put on my same old hat. I have caught you, Mr,



Fibber."

Lucien minutely scrutinized the headgear,

"It is your new hat, Sis. You are quizzing me."

"No; it is the same shabby, disreputable, out-of-date abomination I have been wearing for the past six weeks, waiting for that snail of modistes, Vachonette, to make me a new one. If any other modiste could fit me, I'd quit her."

"Umph!" grunted Lucien. "All hats look alike to me."

He saw a loop-hole of escape and added, fussily: "If you want me to be dressed in time for Mass, skip out of here."

Blanche sat on the edge of the bed and said, decidedly:

"Not before I come to an understanding with you about something which has been on my mind for a whole week."

Lucien sank into a *fauteuille* and groaned aloud.

"Always looking for trouble. What is it, Blanche?"

"It is about Lolotte."

Her eyes were mercilessly fixed upon his face.

"Lolotte?" he stammered, as red as a beet.

"Yes, Lolotte—Madame Vachonette's pretty assistant. Monsieur blushes like a school-girl when that name is mentioned. Explanations are now in order, monsieur."

Lucien looked helplessly at his sister. She had caught him completely off his guard and he was at a loss what to say, being afraid to commit himself. His confusion proved his salvation. Taking his silence for a confession of guilt, Blanche said, her face wreathed in smiles:

'Hoho, monsieur! Your duplicity is now unmasked. I was not mistaken in maintaining that you had bowed to the girl last Sunday. — Tell me, how long have you



known Lolotte? "

Dumont felt overjoyed. So it was a false alarm, after all -- Blanche knew nothing. It was simply the same old story of the Sunday before and he felt safe. He had now regained his composure. Looking up, he said, carelessly:

"Did'nt I tell you Sunday I did not know the girl? "

"You did have the impudence to say so, monsieur."

"Of course you do not believe me? "

"It is a waste of breath to ask."

"Were I to swear on my honor, would you believe me?"

"Yes," she answered, without hesitation. "But you cannot and will not. It would be unworthy of a Dumont."

Lucien inwardly chuckled. The battle was almost won. He could safely swear that he *did not* know the girl, leaving after-events unconfessed.

"I give you my word of honor I did not know who Lolotte was until you told me. Do you doubt me now?"

She came to where he was and sat on his knee.

"If all the world were to tell me the contrary, I would still believe you. But you know her *now*, you rascal," she added, gaily, shaking her rosy finger in his face. "You blushed like a rose when I mentioned her name."

Lucien's quick mind evolved a plausible story.

"It is all due to your making an errand boy of me," he observed, jovially. "When I delivered your message to Madame Vachonette, she called out 'Lolotte, Lolotte,' and the girl we met last Sunday tripped in from the rear room. The Madame then told her not to fail to send your hat. She replied that she would do so at once and went back to her



work. 'Quite a pretty girl.' I said to Madame Vachonette. She smiled and replied: 'Yes, monsieur; and as modest as she is pretty.' I then bowed to the Madame and went to the Club. When you mentioned Lolotte's name, I thought Madame Vachonette had babbled about the remark I made and I felt embarrassed, knowing what a tease you are."

"But, Lucien, if you don't know Lolotte, why did she greet you so effusively Sunday?"

He explained how he had happened to bow to the little milliner, then added, genuinely perplexed:

"What puzzles me, is that she said 'Bonjour' to me."

Blanche burst into a merry laugh.

"You are the dullest man in creation. She did not say 'Bonjour' to you, but to me."

"And you knew this all along?"

"Yes; but I thought you were acquainted with her and wanted to fool me. That is why I asked you to stop at Madame Vachonette's. I wanted to see how you would act."

"And being innocent, I baffled your little plot?"

"It was dark in the hall and I could not clearly see your face, but the promptness with which you agreed to deliver the message, dispelled my suspicions. You would not have dared to go in that shop if you knew Lolotte, but would have given some plausible excuse. Was not my judgment correct?"

"You are a level-headed diplomat," remarked Lucien, pointing to the clock; "but I would advise you to cast



your optics in this direction. Do we go to church today?"

Blanche glanced at the clock.

"Ten minutes of eleven! Oh, but we'll be late! I just have to put on my hat. I'll be ready right away. And you—"

"If you get out of here, I'll be ready inside of five minutes."

The priest was intoning the *Gloria* as the Dumonts entered the church. Blanche had taken the precaution to lock the pew the evening previous and the brother and sister were able to attend Mass among the fashionable parishioners.

Blanche was resplendent in a new dress and new hat. She was too busy thinking how many feminine eyes were enviously criticizing her toilette to pay any attention to Lucien or persons worshiping in the side aisles of the church. Had her eyes been as sharp as usual, she would have noticed the look of recognition which passed between her brother and the little milliner. It was like a flash, but it was sufficient to cause the roses to come to the cheeks of the young girl and the artist to imagine that the gloomy old edifice had suddenly been transformed into heaven.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE TRIUMPH OF THE SERPENT.

“Good-bye, Blanche. I am going to the club.”

“Good-night, Lucien. Don't come home too late, dear.”

“All right, Sis. I'll be home very early.”

Every night it was the same thing—the same admonition, the same answer. And Lucien generally returned home very early.....in fact, so early, that the roosters would be crowing and the *calas* women, on their way to the *Marché Francais*, would respectfully incline their *tignons* as they psased him by.

Instead of going to the club, Lucien wended his way to the vine-sheltered cottage in far-off Bayou Road. It was Monday, the night he had promised to call.

Lolotte mechanically admitted him, as if it was a matter of course. She was pale and wan and still had the frightened look in her limpid blue eyes; but she answered his questions about her health carelessly and naturally, and he never for a moment imagined that she was sick and suffering; that her heart was on the verge of despair.

She introduced him to her mother. She did not know his name, did not inquire and did not seem to think it



of any consequence, but simply said :

“ Mother, this is the gentleman who was so kind to me and who loaned me his umbrella the other day.”

This was the formal introduction. And the mother held out her hand to him, as one does to a comrade, thanking him effusively, and went back to her room, excusing herself on the plea of feeling tired and needing rest.

Lolotte told him what had happened after his departure Saturday evening. Pierre had come a few moments later, his usually red face white with anger, his limbs seeming hardly able to support him. She came to meet him, but he pushed her rudely away and sank into a chair, speechless and panting. She thought he was going to have a fit and was about to call her mother, who was ironing her Sunday petticoat under the shed, when the storm burst forth. She was ashamed to repeat what he said. At times, she thought he was going to beat her; but he contented himself with abusing her shamefully and had left in a towering rage, vowing he would never return.

“ So it is all over between you and Pierre?” said Lucien.

“ Oh, no,” she answered simply. “ When his anger cools off, he’ll feel sorry and come back and beg my pardon. He thought you were courtin gme and is jealous, that’s all”

“ So he did not come yesterday?”

“ No; and I did not expect him, either. He will sulk for a few days yet. He loves me and will not be able to stay away.”

“ Supposing he persists in keeping away?”



"I would write to him to come back, I am to blame, you know, although I meant no harm." After a moment's reflection, she resumed: "You must not come here any more, monsieur. It displeases Pierre and I am afraid he might harm you. He has such a violent temper."

Dumont could not refrain from smiling at the idea that Pierre could hurt him.

"Don't you think I am sturdy enough to take care of myself?" he asked.

"I know you could ably defend yourself," she hastened to reply, thinking she had perhaps offended him; "but I don't think it is right for me to receive attentions from anyone while I am the promised wife of another. This must be the last time you come to see me, monsieur."

Her simplicity charmed and amused him.

"We could be friends, at all events," he said, softly. "Pierre might be cruel to you, tyrannize you, beat you — and if you have no one to whom you can look to in your hours of darkness, how vain, how empty your life will be!"

It was the Serpent who was speaking. The girl felt a strange sensation thrill every fibre of her body. Seeing her helplessness, the tempter continued:

"Think of a pretty, refined and sensitive girl like you linked forever to a man like Pierre. You are above your station, Lolotte, and should aspire higher,"

"Pierre has been good to me," came the answer, in a low, faint voice. "He is crude, but he is honest. I have promised to be his wife. I must be fair to him."



“Plead, and she is yours,” whispered the Serpent.  
“Can’t you see she is ready to fall? Fool, she is at your mercy!”

Lucien took the slender hand in his. Lolotte did not resist.

“Do you really love Pierre? Think of the sacrifice if you marry him simply because you have promised to do so. It will be moral suicide every day of your life.”

He bent his head until his lips were nearly touching hers. Like a fascinated bird, she fixed her startled eyes upon his face, powerless to resist love’s hypnotism. Then, all of a sudden, he kissed her, full upon the lips. It was more like a touch of flame than a mere caress, unlike the kisses Pierre had ever given her. A mist passed before her eyes and she saw nothing—nothing save the passion-kindling eyes looking into her own and thrilling her to the very soul.

“You love me, little one?”

It was the same soft, caressing voice in which he had said “You look tired, little one!” the first time they had met. A fierce joy surged in her breast. All memory of Pierre was instantly swept away.

“Yes, I love you! Press me close to your heart and let me lie there for all time to come!”

And the Serpent’s yellow eyes gleamed and glistened and he crept back into his hole, exultant at his triumph.



## CHATER XV.

### THE OMEN OF THE FALLING STAR.

Winter had given way to Spring and Spring to Summer. Dumont was now Lolotte's accepted lover ; only, he had asked her to keep their engagement a secret, as he could not marry before a lawsuit growing out of his father's succession was settled. And she, trusting him, had agreed.

Luoien no longer waited for Lolotte on the street now. He was too well known about town and was afraid of exciting comment. Once or twice could do no harm, but if he were seen every evening waiting for the girl or escorting her home, the busy-bodies would be sure to wag their tongues. It takes so little to mar a woman's reputation, especially when she is young and pretty, and the mere fact that he, a man of the world, was paying marked attention to a working girl, would place the poor wage-earner in a questionable light in the eyes of a cynical public.

Although Dumont knew that an alliance with Lolotte was not to be thought of, he really liked and respected the dainty little milliner. He looked upon himself as her protector, a sort of foster-brother, and would readily have avenged on the field of honor any affront to her fair name.



One radiant night in August, as Lucien lingered on the steps, a shooting-star suddenly flared across the heavens, leaving a long fiery trail in its wake.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Lolotte.

"Did you make a wish?" asked Lucien.

"No," was the answer, in disappointed tones. "The star passed too swiftly." Then, looking into his face: "My Lucien, you who are book-learned and wise,—tell me, why do people make a wish when they see a shooting-star?"

"It is a custom, dearest."

"I know it is; but why? I have often wondered."

"It is an old superstition, a legacy of the ignorance and fanaticism of the Middle Ages. It is a pretty legend."

"And will you tell it to your little sweetheart?"

"Why, of course. As if I can refuse my little one anything. Let us go in: I am tired standing."

When they were seated in the parlor, Lucien began:

"The custom of wishing when a falling star whirls through space, is practiced alike by Christian and pagan. Here and there, in the highways and by-ways of the world, many legends and superstitions still linger and continue to retain their ancient prestige. In Roumania and Gallicia, the peasants believe that when a star falls to earth, it is at once transformed into a rarely beautiful woman, who exercises an enchanting influence upon all those who come in contact with her. Every handsome youth unfortunate enough to attract her attention, becomes her victim. Having thus allured them, she winds her long black hair around them and the poor dupes are strangled to death. If certain words



are murmured the moment the star begins to fall, they cause her allurements to lose their power. From this superstition comes the custom of wishing while a star is seen hurrying through the air, a wish said surely to come true if formulated before the light is extinguished. The Spaniards think that falling stars are the errant souls of those whose careers were cut short by destiny before they could go to confession and who have to wander between Heaven and earth until the Day of Judgment. The Arabs imagine these stars to be burning stones thrown by the angels on the heads of devils who attempt to enter heaven. In Normandy, Brittany and along the Bay of Biscay, there is a tradition, implicitly believed by the simple country-folk, that falling stars, meteors and comets, are the unquiet souls of faithless husbands, wives and sweethearts, doomed to wander through space for a thousand years before they can enter Heaven."

"How pretty and romantic," observed Lolotte, looking with admiration into her lover's face. "You must be ever so smart to know all this."

"I have read a great deal," said Dumont, modestly.

"And in spite of your learning your grand family name and your standing in society, will you always love your little Lolotte, a daughter of the people, without ancestral history, without education—"

"Hush, little one!" he interrupted, bending down and kissing her. "As my fiancée, you are the equal of the most exalted women on earth."

Her head fell on his shoulder and her slender fingers lingered caressingly over his face and brow. She was



thoughtful for a moment, then said :

“Do you know that I am Breton, Lucien?”

The young artist smiled and jestingly observed :

“So then, if ever I prove untrue to you, my soul will go bumping about space like a sky-rocket?”

“I don’t believe in such nonsense. We have other beautiful traditions, some of which come true even now.”

She was once more plunged in deep reflections.

“Do you know what would happen if ever you were to deceive me?” she asked, pausing in her caresses.

“You would marry Pierre,” replied Lucien, laughingly.

“No,” resumed Lolotte, seriously: “I love only you and will care for no one else in this or in worlds hereafter. If ever you are false to me, I will die of a broken heart and my ghost will haunt you to your dying day and harm those who are most dear to you.”

“What an odd little body you are. If I did not know you so well, I could take an oath you meant what you said.”

“I do mean what I said, Lucien, because my whole life is wrapped up in you. In Bretagne, where my parents were born, when a lover proves false to his sweetheart and she sincerely loves him, she dies of a broken heart. If he ever marries, her ghost haunts him day and night, tormenting him and doing harm to those who are dear to him. I am a Breton woman and I love dearly.”



Dumont laughed it off as a good joke; but he felt strangely uneasy that night when, in the stillness of his room, he thought the matter over. He had the latent, deep-rooted superstitious trait of the Latin race and Lolotte's uncanny words had upset his customary serene and careless trend of thoughts.

“Bah, it's sheer nonsense,” he argued.

But it was weeks before the feeling wore off.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### A LOGICIAN COMES TO GRIEF.

It was a jolly group which was merry-making in the Absinthe House. judging from the shouts, the topical songs, the clapping of hands and stamping of feet, the rollicking outbursts of laughter and the constant cries of "Papa Frimoose! Papa Frimoose!" which now and then came to the ear of the passing pedestrian.

The trio which made up the group need no formal introduction to the reader, for they are old acquaintances—Millistoon, artist; Chainarre, lawyer, who had received his diploma five years before and had never tried a case; and Guoneuille, poet and cynic and reporter on the staff of *L'Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orleans*.

"Dumont is late tonight," observed Chainarre.

"I was just thinking about him," remarked Guoneuille. "There is something the matter with that boy. He has changed wonderfully during the past three months. I say, Millistoon, what do you think is the matter with Dumont?"

"Torpid liver," promptly answered the artist.

Guoneuille glared contemptuously at his comrade.



"Millistoon, you are an ass," he said.

"I am certainly in congenial company."

"You mean to say——"

"That you are a bigger ass than I."

"Impossible. Prove it, and I pay the score for a week."

"It is self-evident. Suppose we submit the question to Chainarre? He comes of a long-eared family."

"And is a lawyer, besides — of untried experience."

Chainarre thumped the table and indignantly retorted:

"This is a base slander! I have a diploma which entitles me to practice law, but I refute the imputation that I am a lawyer."

"I was only joking, Chainarre," remarked Guoneuille, in conciliatory tones. "It would be rank idiocy to call you a lawyer. We want your opinion as a logician, not as a lawyer. Does this meet with your approval, Millistoon?"

"Agreed. The forfeit to be the wager I offered."

After seemingly endless preliminaries, as is usually the case before tipsy men arrive at a decision, it was finally concluded to put the proposition in the following shape:

"Who is the greatest ass—Guoneuille or Millistoon?"

Chainarre suggested that they have another round of absinthe, to clear his mental faculties. His companions readily assented. He then assumed an air of profound wisdom and gravely began:

"The question submitted for my deliberation and determination, reminds me of the famous *Syllogismus Crocodilus* of Aristotle, which is as follows: A crocodile seizes an in-



fant playing on the banks of a river. The mother rushes to the rescue. The crocodile, an intelligent animal, promises to restore the child if she will tell him truly what will happen to it. 'You will never restore it!' cries the mother, somewhat hastily. But the crocodile astutely rises to the occasion. 'If you have spoken truly,' he says, 'I cannot restore the child without destroying the truth of your assertion. If you have spoken falsely, I cannot restore the child, because you have not fulfilled the agreement; therefore, I cannot restore it, whether you have spoken truly or falsely.' But the mother, too, exhibits logical powers that are rare indeed in her sex. 'If I have spoken truly,' she says, 'you must restore the child, by virtue of your agreement. If I have spoken falsely, that can only be when you have restored the child. Therefore, whether I have spoken truly or falsely, the child must be restored.' Mother and crocodile may still be arguing out that question. History is silent as to the issue."

"With all due respect to your astute reasoning powers," observed Guoneuille, with frigid sarcasm, "I fail to see what bearing your crocodile story has on the question submitted to you, O! modern incarnation of Solomon."

'Neither do I,' said Millistoon.

"To a sensible man, the simile is clear and to the point. If, in saying that Millistoon is an ass, you state the truth, then, *ipso facto*, he is one; but if, in making the statement, you speak falsely, then you are not only an ass, but a liar as well."

Guoneuille sadly shook his head.

L. of C.



"Your wonderful peroration decides nothing; in fact the matter is decidedly more obscure. As a logician, you are a brilliant failure. I think you are the biggest jackass of all."

"I heartily agree with Guoneuille," put in Millistoon.

And after a great deal of parleying, drinking and toasting, it was finally solemnly decided that Chainarre was the biggest jack of the three and as such entitled to the proud honor of footing up all convivial bills for a week to come. And he, losing sight of the fact that he had not been a party to the agreement, accepted the decision as a matter of course and began to doze. Guoneuille vigorously shook him.

"Chainarre — Chainarre! Be amiable. Entertain us with a song, you drunken sot. Be sociable."

Chainarre took up and drank the remaining absinthe and immediately went to sleep again, without deigning to reply.

"Let the inebriate sleep," said Millistoon. "If we want any entertainment, the talent is right here."

And, without further preamble, he sang as follows :

Modest look and downcast eye,  
Pretty maiden passing by,  
Don't you hear me gently sigh,  
Pretty maiden passing by.

Pretty maiden passing by,  
Looks so timid and so shy,  
Will you love me till I die,  
Pretty maiden passing by.



But, alas ! she'll not reply,  
Will not even tel! me why —  
So another maid I'll try,  
Who may come a-passing by.

“ Bravo—Bravo ! ” cried Guoneuille.

And he clapped his hands and stamped his feet so noisily, that Chainarre awoke with a start and looked dazedly around. The short nap he had taken had almost sobered him.

“ It's fearfully dull here,” he said. “ Let's go to Mere Jiguette's.”

“ A superb idea,” said Guoneuille.” I'm with you.”

“ Ditto,” added Millistoon. “ On to Jiguette's ! ”

And they walked out of the place with interlocked arms, singing at the top of their voices :

“ But, alas ! she'll not reply,  
Will not even tell me why —  
So another maid I'll try,  
Who may come a-passing by.”



## CHAPTER XVII.

### CHILDREN OF THE STREET.

Mere Jiguette was a Marseillaise and kept a dance-hall on Bourbon Street, where morals were at a premium. It bore a very unsavory reputation and was often raided by the police; but our Bohemians felt no scruples about frequenting the place. The police knew them and even if the place was raided while they were there, they were never molested.

On their way to Mere Jiguette's, the trio met the truant Dumont and persuaded him to accompany them.

As the quartette entered the cafe, they saw a young girl reel backward, as if from the impetus of a blow and heard Mere Jiguette furiously exclaim:

"Get out of here, you thief! I've caught you at last."

The girl threw the piece of bread she had snatched from the counter into the woman's face and backed toward the door, where she stopped and defiantly retorted:

"Thief? You are the biggest thief of all. How many times have you swindled me, when I had only a few cents and spent them all here for your stale bread and wormy cheese? And today, because I am starving and can't pay you grudge me a crumb of bread. I'll go when I feel like it."



She folded her arms resolutely on her breast as she stood her ground and a flame of red in both cheeks brought out the whiteness of her skin.

"If she were dressed in silk and lace and had a billion slaves, she could not be more beautiful," said Millistoon.

Dumont was looking at her steadily.

"I should like to be a portrait painter," he observed.

Millistoon smiled at his friend's admiration.

"What would you do—paint the tigress?" he asked.

"Yes, and become famous. Look at that poise!"

"And since you are a mere dauber of cows and trees—"

"I'll do the next best thing—fall in love with her."

As he spoke, a boy of about seventeen, who had been watching the scene from behind a pillar, walked up to the girl and, taking her by the arm, said:

"Come with me, Minette. I have ten cents and we can buy some *galettes* and *cafe-noir* at the French Market. We'll only have one cup, but we won't starve." Then, walking up to the counter and shaking his finger in Mere Jiguetet's face: "You cow! You vampire! I'll show you what it costs to insult my lady. I know you didn't pay the police this week and they are just itching to run you in. I'll tell the captain you robbed me of a gold watch and chain and two thousand dollars. He won't believe me, but he'll raid your dive anyhow, just for spite. Ta-ta, old she cat."

He doffed his ragged hat, bowed with mock politeness and was about to walk away, when Mere Jiguette called out:

"Paul—Paul! Come back here, you vagabond. Old friends must not fall out for trifles. If you are hungry and



broke, your credit is good for twenty-five cents."

The bribe was tempting. Paul looked at Minette.

"Don't accept any favors from her, Paul," said the girl, her eyes flashing. "Ten cents is enough for two."

She caught hold of his arm and the pair silently went out into the street. Dumont started towards the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Millistoon, barring the way. "You are liable to get your head thumped if you flirt with that girl. Paul is a bold and fearless knight."

"Stop your joking, Max," said Dumont, earnestly. "The poor waifs are hungry. Suppose we haul them into a hahsery and let them gorge themselves to their hearts' content?"

The idea of a new adventure charmed Millistoon.

"You are a rum fellow, Dumont," he observed. "Those children are Bohemians, like us—only, a trifle more unfortunate, that's all. What say you, comrades?"

"To the rescue," shouted Guoneuille, delighted.

"My last breath is theirs," chimed in Chainarre.

"Spare them your breath, for charity's sake," observed Millistoon. "They are afflicted enough already."

Chainarre joined in the roar of laughter which followed and the four boon companions started in their search for Paul and Minette. They went to the French Market, but the waifs had left immediately after eating their doughnuts and coffee and had gone towards the woods, the waiter said.

The quartette kept up the search for over an hour. They went through the slums, asking everyone they met the same question: "Do you know a girl by the name of Minette?" in some places she was known and had been seen early that



night : at others, they had never heard of her, did not care a straw about her and advised the gentlemen to go or they would call the police; for the 'gentlemen' were anything but quiet in their persistent search for Minette and her companion. Millistoon finally stopped and said, in disgust:

“ Let us give up. I begin to feel like a parrot who can only say one thing, ‘Do you know a girl by the name of Minette?’ Let us go back. We’ll probably find her at Jiguettes.”



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MERE JIGUETTE'S DANCE HALL.

It was long past ten when the searchers returned to the hall. The place was crowded with all classes of men and women, drinking, talking and laughing. The quadroom women, gaudily attired and loaded with flashy jewelry, ran here and there through the crowd, laughing, flirting and clinking glasses with convivial gallants. Some were dancing the *can-can*, some *La Bamboula*, the music being furnished by a negro orchestra composed of two fiddles, a trombone and a fife. As our friends entered, one of the fiddlers was dolorously playing and singing the following ditty:

“ Missier Maziro,  
Dan so vié biro,  
Li 'semble ein crapo  
Dan ein baille dolo.”

And all those who felt like it, shouted the chorus:

“ Dansez, Calida, boodoom-boodoom;  
Dansez Calida, boodoom-boodoom.”

The manipulator of the trombone, who seemed to be a sort of master of ceremonies, clapped his hands three times to command silence, and announced, in stentorian tones:

“ De nex' ting on de pergrammy am a vocal seleckshun  
by dat grate favorite, Boule la Neige. Keep yer moufs



shet an' yer feetses still until he am by de choris."

"Boule-la-Neige,"—negro dialect for "Snowball"—an African of remarkable blackness, who was one of the fiddlers, struck a lively tune and began singing:

QUAND LISE COURRI L'EGLISE.

I.

Serpan dan cyprière,  
Lézar en ho barrière,  
Zibou dan pacanier,  
Titis dan latanier.  
Choual-jiab qui fé prière,  
Bèf avec tête si fière,  
Crapo en ho birouette,  
Chien qui pé fé girouette—  
'Réié tous to bitin,  
Vini dan gran chimin  
Pou ouar mo l'amour, Lise,  
Courri a so l'église.  
Mo l'aimin li! Mo l'aimin li!  
Pli qué chac-chac l'aimin diri!

II.

Bèf 'Takapas féroce,  
Choual qui cassé carosse,  
Lapin dan champ dicane,  
Grenouille aupré cabane,  
Manzeur poulet canaille,  
Coq qui l'aimin bataille,  
Cosson tout plein labou,  
Crébiche kasché dan trou—  
Vini coté chimin  
Pou ouar mo l'ange divin,  
Mo zoli pitiit Lise  
Courri a so l'église.  
Mo l'aimin li! Mo l'aimin li!  
Pli qué chac-chac l'aimin diri!



At the end of each verse, the whole crowd vociferated :

*“ Mo l'aimin li, mo l'aimin li,  
Pli que chac-chac l'aimin diri.”*

Dumont began to feel dizzy. The heat, the noise, the shouts, the tumultuous stamping of feet, and the dense clouds of smoke from the fetid cigarettes and still worse cigars “sporting” by the motley crowd, made his head swim.

“ Whew, this is worse than a pest-house,” he said, rising. “ I have enough of this. Good-night, boys.”

His companions waved him a lazy farewell and he hastened away. As he reached the street, a boy rushed in and shouted at the top of his voice:

“ The police ! The police ! ”

The music instantly ceased and musicians and spectators scampered through side doors and open windows into rear rooms and secret passages. The only persons who remained cool and indifferent amid the uproar, were our friends and Mere Jiguette. They were used to these interruptions and knew exactly what to do in such emergencies.

The boy whose warning cry had caused the panic, stalked arrogantly in the doorway and began making “ La Bernique ” at Mere Jiguette. For the information of those who do not know this grotesque pantomime, an explanation is necessary: “ La Bernique ” consists in placing the thumb of the left hand on the tip of the nose and extending the fingers to their utmost capacity; then the thumb of the right hand is placed at the extreme end of the extended finger and



the fingers of both hands are worked vigorously up and down, the performer's tongue popping in and out all the while and keeping time with the movements of the fingers. Try the experiment before your mirror, gentle reader, and see how quickly you will become an expert.

"La Bernique" was in our early days considered a most aggravating insult and the old Marseillaise showed her disapproval of the performance by savagely hurling a beer mug at the urchin's head. The latter adroitly dodged the missile and jeeringly said:

"I fooled you good this time, Mamam Jiguette. The police isn't coming: it's a joke."

"What!" screamed the old woman, furiously. "Do you mean to say you have ruined my business for the night just for a senseless joke?"

"'T'aint senseless. You'll learn to treat my lady with more respect in future. Ta-ta, old hen!"

"You vermin—let me get hold of you!"

Mere Jiguette, purple with rage, ran around the counter and made for her tormentor: but the boy, with a loud laugh of derision, took to his heels and was soon out of reach.

Like one awaking from a dream; Dumont gazed at the fast-disappearing youth.

"I'll be hanged if it isn't the boy who was with Minette to-night," he mused. "I wonder if she is still hungry?"

Then, becoming suddenly imbued with rabid philanthropic motives, he started in pursuit of the fleeing gamin. When he reached the corner the boy was nowhere to be seen. Dumont paused in his impetuous rush.



“I wonder what Millistoon, Guoneuille and Chainarre would say if they saw me? This is ridiculous. Admitting that I did catch up with the young vagabond, he would certainly keep out of my reach, for he no doubt saw me in that disreputable den and would take me for one of Jiguette’s avenging spirits. The girl can go to the devil.”

He hailed a passing cab and went home.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE CAPTURE OF MINETTE.

The evening following the exciting scenes at Mere Jiguette's, Millistoon was aimlessly strolling about the streets, like a man who cannot make up his mind what to do, when just as he turned into Canal Street, he caught a glimpse of a pair of tattered figures hurrying along past the sauntering people. He recognized Minette and her valorous champion of the preceding night.

“Hello, here's Dumont's starveling and her gladiator. I wonder if she is still hungry? — *Eh, la-bas!*”

But the waifs did not hear him. He hastened after them, so as not to lose sight of them in the crowd. Then he lost sight of them. He was about to give up, when he caught sight of the pair looking in a show-window.

-- Now I've got them!”

He pushed his way through the crowd, but before he could reach them, they were off again, forging ahead with redoubled energy.

“Confound the brats!” thought Millistoon. “I'll get them if it takes all night. — I say, Minette, stop a minute. Minette—Minette!”



Hearing her name called out, the girl wheeled about: but seeing no one she knew, except a policeman, she was seized by a sudden panicky feeling. She caught Paul's arm and dragged him along.

"Come on—quick!" she cried. "Mere Jiguette has sent the police after us."

Paul gave a hurried look backward and seeing the representative of the law, caught hold of Minette's hand and the two fled down Chartres Street as fast as their legs could carry them. Millistoon jumped into a carriage.

"Keep those two runaways in sight," he said, pointing to the fleeing couple. "Don't attract their attention."

He was beginning to like the adventure immensely. And then, the exultation of capturing Minette, after a two days' chase. He would trot her to Papa Frimoose's, rags and all, and airily remark to his astounded companions:

"You are all a set of chumps. Single-handed, I have accomplished what your united efforts failed to do."

They would be crushed, dumbfounded at his sagacity. They would think him a second Napoleon——

The cab came to a sudden stop. So did Millistoon's vainglorious thoughts. The driver leaned over.

"They have just turned into Rue St. Ann, monsieur."

"Well, why the devil don't you follow them?"

"The street is impassable, monsieur. I can go no further. If monsieur wishes to follow on foot, there is a good cinder path on the North side."

Millistoon alighted from the cab.



"You have more sense than I would have given you credit for," he observed. "Your idea is a good one. I guess the brats are going to the French Market coffee stand. Wait here till I come back."

Millistoon's surmise was correct. He found Minette and Paul seated at the long table reserved for laborers and the poor. There was a single cup of coffee and two very slim doughnuts in front of the pair, which they were about to share between them as Millistoon appeared.

"Oho, I've caught at last, Minette!"

The girl gave a frightened scream and would have run away, but Millistoon, made wiser by past experience, was holding her tight and her struggles were in vain.

"Don't be afraid, Minette. I will not hurt you."

She turned abruptly around: then, to her captor's astonishment, blushed furiously and cast down her eyes.

"How you frightened me, sir," she said, without raising her eyes. "I thought it was the police." Then, beckoning to her companion, who had prudently retired to a safe distance, pending developments: "Come back, Paul. There's no danger."

Millistoon's surprise was assuming monumental proportions. He let go his hold of Minette.

"How do you know I am not a policeman in disguise?"

Paul beat a hasty retreat, ready to take to his heels the moment he thought the stranger's actions justified it. Minette glanced smilingly at the young cavalier.

"I am not afraid of you, sir," she said coquettishly.

"Why not? I might have a pair of handcuffs in my



pocket."

He scowled at Paul, who retreated still further.

"I know better, sir."

"You do? I wish you would enlighten me."

"You are monsieur Millistoon, the great artist."

If someone had fired a pistol point-blank at him, he would not have been more startled.

"How the dev—excuse me, I mean how the h—that is, how in thunderation do you know who I am?"

Minette drew the cup of coffee toward her.

"I'll tell you after while. I'm too hungry now and my coffee is getting cold. — Come on, Paul. This gentleman is my friend"

Paul, whose confidence in human nature was very limited, gingerly approached and sat as far as he could from the newcomer. He still looked upon him with distrust.

"Leave that vile stuff alone, Minette," said Millistoon, kindly. "I want you to take supper with me."

Minette paused in the act of carrying the cup to her lips.

"A real big supper?" she exclaimed, showing her pretty white teeth. "With a white table-cloth?"

"Yes"

"And five or six dishes?"

"Ten or twelve, if you care to."

Her eyes glistened.

"And red and white wines and cakes and fruit?"

"Yes. Champagne also, if you want."

The child jumped to her feet, joyously clapping her



hands.

"Golly! she cried. "I'll eat and drink until I can't move any more. Let us go. I'm fearfully hungry."

She took his arm and he, laughing, allowed her to lead the way.

"I have a carriage waiting at the corner," he said

"A carriage? Am I going to ride in it?"

"Of course; unless you prefer running alongside in the mud."

The witticism was lost upon her. She thought he was serious and hastened to reply;

"Oh, no—I prefer being inside. I never rode in a carriage in my life. except the Black Maria—and that's not a carriage, either. It has no cushions and no springs."

It was a droll sight, those two walking arm in arm along Rue St. Ann, in the full glare of the brilliant oil lamps swinging in front of the little shops and sailors' boarding-houses which honeycombed the street. Minette was almost in rags, with torn shoes and stockingless feet; Millistoon was faultlessly attired in evening dress, with glossy silk hat and slender gold-headed cane, a cigar between his lips. The shop-keepers stared and wondered what it all meant, until little Marianne, in whose shop one could buy almost everything, from bananas to hairpins and who, being Guoneuille's sweetheart, was presumed to be posted on everything going on about town, gave the following veracious explanation:

"It is Monsienr Millistoon, the artist, and his new



model. You people are way behind the times."

"It seems to me he ought to buy her some clothes," observed old Jean Oujatte, the ship-chandler next door.

"Those artists are such shameless originals," resumed Marianne. "Do you know that he parades every evening on Canal Street with that girl, just as she is to-day?"

The auditors accepted the statement as gospel truth.

"She is a pretty girl—and so young, too," added old Oujatte, shaking his venerable head. "And does she pose for bad pictures also?"

"Everything," answered Marianne, convincingly.

"What depravity!" exclaimed old Oujatte, horrified. "The world is getting more wicked every day."

"Tut, tut, you are old-fahsioned, Papa Oujatte. It's a businesss, just like selling calico or hawking onions. A girl can't starve for the sake of propriety. And when she is pretty and has a fine figure—Pouf! what's the odds? It is better to flirt with the devil than to starve to death. See how happy they look."

"Horrible—horrible!" muttered the old man.

And he entered his shop, to shut out the sinful sight.

The pair had now reached the carriage. Millistoon helped Minette inside, gave some instructions to the driver and was about to step in, when someone timidly tugged at his sleeve. He turned sharply about and encountered Paul's wistful eyes.

"Please, mister, may I tell Minette good-bye?"

It was a diplomatic *coup*, which won the day for the



wily young scamp. At the sound of his voice, Minette bounded to the carriage door.

"Poor Paul, I had forgotten all about him," she said, in tones of deepest sympathy. "Can't Paul come too?"

"Paul can have more fun all by himself," answered Millistoon. "Here, you vagabond, go and gorge yourself."

He selected a treasury note from a well-filled wallet and handed it to Paul. The youngster eagerly grabbed the bill and going to the light, critically examined it.

"How much is it, Paul?" asked Minette, excitedly.

"Five dollars," answered the gamin, carefully folding the precious document and stuffing it in his pocket.

"Bully—eat for six!" exclaimed the girl, with boisterous glee. "Five dollars? Whew! It will *kill* him."

She waved her hand to him and threw him a kiss as the carriage rolled rapidly away.



## CHAPTER XX.

### THE PRODIGAL AND THE WAIF.

When Millistoon found himself alone in the carriage with Minette, for the first time in his life he felt embarrassed in the presence of a woman. Had the girl been fashionably attired, he would readily have found a hundred different subjects to talk about; but what could he say to this child of the streets, whose habitual conversation was the language of the grogshop and whose manners were of that humble world despised by society—the slums of a wicked city? He curiously scrutinized the child. There was a far-away look in her eyes and she was smiling. He found something to say at last. Playfully nudging her, he suddenly exclaimed:

“Boo! What are you thinking about?”

“I was thinking about Paul and the capers he’ll cut up with that money you gave him. Don’t you think he has awful manners? He didn’t even thank you. Oh, but he’ll cut up. He’ll be drunk for a week now. I can see him strutting into Jiguettes, seating himself at the most prominent place and banging the table with all his might, shouting loudly to the old witch, so that everybody can hear him: ‘Mere Jiguettes, a bottle of Ruinart frappe for a mil-



lionaire on a jambooree! Be lively here, old witch.' And he'll flaunt the bill high in the air and Jiguette will break her neck to wait on him. After our supper, we'll go to Jiguette's. I'm sure we'll find him there. He'll stay at the same table night and day, drinking and eating, until his last cent is gone. Then Jiguette will throw him out and the police will jug him. But he'll be the lion of the Quartier for a long time to come."

She laughed until the tears ran down her cheeks. Millistoon was thoughtful for a moment, then observed:

"You vagabonds and we Bohemians have about the same mode of enjoying life—only we can afford to do so luxuriously while you poor waifs take it in small doses and perilous ways, which frequently end in jail and, unfortunately, often in crime and murder."

"Oh, but Paul has never killed anyone," said Minette, in frightened tones. "I'm sure he never will. He sometimes nips a thing or two, but it's only when we're very hungry and he can't get work."

"I did not mean anything personal," said Millistoon, kindly. "Now, tell me, how did you know who I was when I made you a prisoner at the French Market this evening?"

"You'll scold if I tell you," she answered, nervously twitching her fingers.

"I promise you I won't."

"Honor bright?"

"Honor bright."

She seemed confused and averted his gaze.

"Do you remember coming to the assistance of a girl who had sprained her ankle on Dumaine Street, two weeks ago?"



"I remember something of that sort."

"Well, I am that girl."

"You run about pretty lively for one who had a sprained ankle two weeks ago."

"I never had any hurt. I fell on the sidewalk from sheer weakness, not having eaten anything for two days. I was ashamed to say so before a nice gentleman like you and made out I had sprained my ankle. I groaned and cried and you helped me into a hand-cart and gave the man some silver to take me to the hospital. You slipped a bill in my hand and said: 'Here's in case you need something. If you need more, send for me.' You gave me your card. Here it is."

She took from the bosom of her tattered corsage a card, on which was written his name and address.

"Yes, I remember the incident now; but I had forgotten your face."

She glanced up quickly at him, and he thought he saw a look of reproach in her eyes.

"I have not forgotten yours," she observed, looking timidly at him.

"Why didn't you come then, you little humbug? Surely the bill must be all gone by this time. It was only \$2.00—all the change I had after paying the hand-cart man."

"I am not a beggar," she answered, almost proudly. "Paul runs errands and I do odd jobs and that's enough to prevent us from actually starving to death."

"Poor little thing! Do you know that I have been chasing all over town after you for two days?"

"You have? And why?"

"I was at Jiguet's when the old hag abused you so shamefully the other night and felt sorry for you. When



yau ran away, I tried to overtake you, but you melted into the air. I have been looking for you ever since."

He purposely refrained from mentioning the part his comrades had taken in the chase.

"Why should you be looking for me?"

It was her nature to be suspicious.

"To give you the grandest supper you ever had in your life."

"And why?"

"Just to put up a job on Mere Jiguette. We'll go and make 'La Bernique' to her after supper."

"And the old tortoise will be furious!"

The idea seemed to amuse her immensely and she laughed heartily.

"Why didn't you stop when I called you on Canal Street to-night?"

"I did not see you. I only saw a policeman and thought the jig was up."

"Would you have come if you had seen me?"

"Of course."

"So you trust me, eh?"

"Yes."

She was silent for a moment; then, edging closer to him:

"I like you," she said, simply.

"You do, eh? Then we can be capital friends."

"You are so good. Ever since the day you befriended me, I feel happy whenever I see you. Often, at Mamam Jiguette's, when you were drinking and making merry, I have sat in a dark corner, where no one could see me, watching you for hours at a time."

"The deuce you say."

"Yes—an—and—"



She burst out crying.

"Why, Minette, what is the matter?"

"Perhaps this is all a dream," she sobbed, "and I'll wake up and find myself lying on the straw in my garret, hungry and miserable. I feel too happy for this to be real. Tell me, am I really awake? And are we going to have that big supper?"

"Of course you are not dreaming. We will have that supper in a moment.—Ah, here we are."

The carriage had stopped in front of a brilliantly-lighted establishment. Minette looked eagerly out of the window.

"Now I know I'm not dreaming," she said, gaily. "This is Papa Frimoose's place?"

"Yes. Let us get out."

She had already given him her hand, when she hurriedly drew back. For the first time, she noticed her tattered garments and a sudden inexplicable feeling of coquetry took possession of her.

"Oh, no—not in there. It is too fashionable. They'll put me out like a dog."

"Nothing of that sort will happen. You are with me and safe from insult and annoyance. Don't be foolish, Minette. It will be a merry bum."

But she shook her head resolutely. She would not enter the place for all the gold in the world. People would turn up their noses at her and make fun of her dress and broken shoes. Millistoon argued, coaxed and pleaded. It was of no avail. At last, in despair, he said:

"Suppose we go to my house? There you will be at home, with no curious people to bother you."

"And the big supper?"

"I'll order it here and have it sent over. I live just



around the block, on Bourbon Street. It will not take long."

She thought it was a good plan and Millistoon entered the cafe and gave Papa Frimoose the most astounding order he had ever received in his life. It embraced everything one could think of in the edible and drinkable line and almost took his breath away. It would take at least five cooks and half a score of *maritons* to get the meal ready in time. But he would do it. Nothing was impossible when it came to please Monsieur Millistoon.

"Not a word to my friends about this," cautioned the artist; "if you do, I won't pay you and skin you alive into the bargain. Have the whole layout at my house within an hour."

He went back to the carriage and in a few minutes they had reached their destination. Everything was dark inside, except for a light in the hall, which burned brightly.

"Where are you taking me to?" asked Minette, suspiciously.

"This is where I live."

She stepped out and critically surveyed the building.

"What a fine house! It is like the castles I read about in the Detective Library. Golly, it's grand!"

He smiled at her childish enthusiasm and they entered the house. He had the drawing and dining rooms lighted and she opened her eyes in astonishment as the pretty things which surrounded her met her wondering gaze.

"Golly, you must be rich!" she cried; then, as an afterthought: "Are you married?"

"No; I am a Bohemian, like you, knocking about the world." Then looking at her costume: "How would you like to have some new dresses?"



The color mounted to her cheeks and her eyes sought the floor.

"Why do you want to give me new dresses for?"

"Just because I want you to look nice."

She was a long time answering; finally, she said:

"We can talk about this afterward. Let's have that supper first. The only way I can tell I am not dreaming, is when I am eating."

"All right. I'll go and hurry up Papa Frimoose."

He took his hat and went out into the street.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### A STRANGE SUPPER AND A NEW COUSIN.

Left to herself, Minette feasted her eyes on the beautiful things about the room—the Brussels carpet, the rugs, the pictures, the tapestries, the statuettes, the brica-brac, the elegant furniture.

“I must be either dreaming or dead,” thought the mystified child. “This is like heaven.”

In half an hour, Millistoon returned.

“Supper is served,” he announced, cheerily.

He took her by the hand and led into the dining-room. The table was resplendent with snow-white linen, a basket of beautiful red roses in the center and silver chandeliers at each end. And the menu! There was enough to banquet a dozen people—big, savory, steaming dishes, which filled the air with an aroma which made the mouth of the poor waif water. Her eyes bulged out like saucers and she had great difficulty in restraining herself from sprawling all over the table and eating like a dog out of the dishes.

“Sit down, Minette. What do you want to start with?”

“Everything. I’m so hungry I could eat the plates.”

It was a strange scene: The table ablaze with light, re-



flecting the silver; at one end, Maxime Millistoon, the eminent portrait-painter; next to him, Minette, a nobody, a waif from the slums of a great city, with her tattered dress and yawning shoes.

Minette chattered like a parrot. She spoke learnedly of the viands, praised the wines, went into ecstasies over the fruit, eating, eating, eating all the while, until Millistoon wondered where she could stow away all that disappeared from her plate. She smiled at his pleasantries and they talked about a hundred varied topics. The time sped on merrily, unheeded by the waif and unnoticed by the prodigal. Finally, Minette pushed back her chair and said:

"I can't eat another mouthful. It's too bad, with all those good things going to waste." Then she suddenly remarked: "Are you serious about those dresses you spoke about before supper?"

"Certainly. You can have as many as you want."

"And what are you going to ask me in return."

"To love me—just a little bit. Do you think you could?"

He sat beside her and looked pleadingly into her face. She caught hold of his hand and tenderly kissed it.

"Yes, I can. I have loved you ever since the day you pitied me, thinking I had hurt my ankle."

He lifted her bodily from the chair, took her in his arms and kissed her full on the lips. She pushed him back, gently, but firmly.

"No—no—you must not do that. It is not good to make love after such a grand supper. It will spoil the digestion."

They both laughed and she resumed, a little more seriously:

"Before you came, no one had ever been kind to me—



except Paul. Poor Paul! He is not bad—only a little wild, that's all. He likes to get drunk and I used to drink because he did. We seemed to forget that we were homeless and hungry when we were drunk. But I shall never drink any more, if you let me stay with you. Will you let me be near you? I will be your servant, your slave, and promise to behave myself."

"You can stay here as long as you want to. You need not work; I have servants enough. Just imagine you are a grand lady and own this house, servants and all. Only, you must dress nicely and have nothing to do with Paul or your old comrades."

A pained expression overspread the girl's face.

"Give up Paul? It will be hard. We have been together since we were children."

"I'll see that he is well provided for; but he must not know you are here. Those gamins are too troublesome. Do you promise?"

She was thoughtful for a long time; then:

"Perhaps you are right. Paul tempts me and I can't resist. I will give up even Paul for your sake."

"All right. I'll have you installed in your apartments."

He rang for Zoozoon, the housekeeper, and told her to let Minette sleep in her room that night. He explained that she was the daughter of a poor great-uncle of his, who had died in penury and had consigned the child to his care. She had come over in the steerage and all her clothes and belongings had been stolen.

"Give her a good bath," he added, "and to-morrow I'll have a room fixed up for her. It is too late now. I want you to go early in the morning to Madame Vachonette and have her come here. I want the child togged in the latest



fashion, from head to feet. Good-night, Minette. Be a good girl."

He kissed her on the cheek, as one would a daughter or a sister, and she was led away by the discreet Zoozoon, who, whatever she thought of the matter, kept her mouth shut. She had been drilled from infancy to observe and act without asking questions and other people's morals did not concern her.



## CHAPTER XXII.

### MILLISTOON'S ROMANTIC DREAM.

The next day, about noon, Millistoon came in with a jovial air.

"Zoozoon is too slow," he observed. "I went after **the** dresses myself."

Behind him was Madame Vachonette, accompanied by a woman with a great bundle. As the women entered, he went out of the room.

"Call me when my cousin is dressed," he remarked.

Then the fitting began.

"You must pardon me, mademoiselle," the Madame explained, "but I have very few ready-made toilettes. Monsieur Millistoon said it was an urgent case and told me the misfortune that had happened to you. What hordes of dishonest people there are in this world. Even stealing the clothes from a poor orphan's back.—Ah, I think that, with a few alterations, this dress will fit all right."

She went to the door and called out:

"Monsieur, you can come in now."

"You look charming, Minette," said Millestoön, all smiles at the transformation. "Take her measures for as many toilettes as she wants. I want to make up for all the



misery she went through. If my uncle had only written, I would have sent money over. Bah, those peasants are so foolishly proud."

And, like a respectful and discreet cousin, he retired when the Madame began taking the girl's measurements.

He stopped Madame Vachonette in the hall.

"Bring lingerie—everything. The poor thing has been robbed of every stitch of clothing. Yes, to-morrow will do."

The succeeding days were dreams to the amateur philanthropist. He lived like a man whose head is in the clouds and who fancies he has no feet. He had not said a word to his companions about the advent of his new cousin and when they reproached him for not being with them as much as before, he would say:

"I have caught the fever from Dumont. I have resolved to reform and lead a virtuous life hereafter."

But the most genuine mourner was Papa Frimoose, who had only seen Millistoon by fits and starts since that astounding supper he had ordered. He sadly missed the bon vivant, and missed still more the banknotes he used to leave with him every night, after a debauch with Guoneuille, Dumont and Chainare.

"It's absinthe," argued the old fellow, knowingly shaking his head. "He'll come back when he gets over his fit."

As the days went by, Millistoon became more infatuated than ever with Minette. He began to believe he really loved her and formulated wild plans to clandestinely take her away from New Orleans—to Paris, even. No one would know whence she had sprung. He would place her in a convent, marry her when she became educated enough and in a few years bring her back to New Orleans. No one



would recognize in the beautiful wife of Maxime Millistoon, artist of international celebrity, the poor waif who once was called a thief by a low dive keeper, because she was starving and had snatched a piece of bread from the counter.

Two weeks sped by. Millistoon was now an abject slave to Minette's beauty and was actively engaged in making preparations for leaving the City with the girl and taking her to Paris, to carry out his plan of redemption.

His brother artists were dumbfounded at his sudden desire to return to the Old World.

"We all thought you were going to make New Orleans your permanent home," half-questioned Guoneuille one day, in the Absinthe House.

Millistoon had dropped in for the first time since he had run away from them, two weeks previous. Only Guoneuille and Chainarre were there. Dumont had also taken a reform fit—for reasons well-known to the reader—and no longer chummed with his old comrades. He sometimes came to the Cercle—that was all.

"Well, you see, here's how it all came about," said Millistoon, in answer to Guoneuille's question. "My old aunt in Paris, who is fabulously rich and keeps me supplied with money, is about to snuff out her candle. She wants to kiss me before she dies. I am her only living relative and I must see that she does not bequeath her wealth to some priest or some religious institution. Of course I'll come back to New Orleans as soon as I have buried the old barnacle. Do you blame me, comrades?"

"Not a bit," replied Guoneuille.

"It is my firm conviction that you a lucky, good-for-nothing canine," put in Chainarre.



Guoneuille filled the three empty glasses.

"Here's to the speedy death of the old aunt," he said, irreverently.

And they laughed and joked and clinked glasses and it seemed as if the good old times had returned. Presently, Millistoon pulled out his watch and looked at the time.

"Nine o'clock!" he exclaimed, rising abruptly. "I never thought it was so late."

He shook hands with Chainarre and Guoneuille and walked rapidly away.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A SOLILOQUY AND A MARVELOUS CAB RIDE.

Guoneuille sadly shook his head as Millistoon disappeared from sight.

"I say, Chainarre," he began, a look of perplexity on his countenance, "what has come over Millistoon lately? And what the deuce ails Dumont? What's gone wrong with the world, anyhow? What do you think about it, Chainarre?"

"Zashallright," thickly replied Chainarre.

"What's all right?" Then, looking steadily at him: "Drunk again! Why don't you quit this debasing practice, Chainarre? Why don't you do like me. I never get drunk. I am the soberest man in Christendom. I don't see why a man should swill liquor like a hog. It besots the intellect, places one on the level of the beast. I wonder if the drunkard left any absinthe in the decanter? Ah, yes—just one drink. Well, here's to your speedy disintegration, you sot."

He gulped down a glassful of the opalescent liquid and resumed:

"I say, Chainarre, let's talk this matter over. It's serious—more serious than you think. There's only two of us



left now. We used to be six. Henri Dufour was the first to go. He got married and that was the end of it. Gustave Lavergne slapped Raoul Belane's face and got a rapier-thrust through the breast for this diversion the next morning under the Oaks. This left four of us. Then Lucien Dumont's sister thought he was going too rapidly to the devil and keeps him tied to her apron strings. And to cap the climax, Millistoon becomes suddenly insane and is going to expatriate himself. What would become of me, should you commit suicide? I would drink myself to death through sheer loneliness.—I say, Chainarre, let's talk this matter over."

Chainarre's head had fallen on his breast. He was fast asleep.

"You're an agreeable companion," resumed Guoneuille, shaking him in a futile endeavor to arouse him. "You are amusing, entertaining, sociable. You are the quintessence of politeness." Then, angrily giving him a thrust, which sent the sleeper sprawling on the floor: "I hope you'll never wake, you drunken brute. I'm done with you. I'm going to spend the night at Millistoon's. Good-bye forever, you dog."

He gave the prostrate form a parting kick and staggered through the door into the wine-room.

"Papa Frimoose, you thieving extortioner and macer," he said, turning to the proprietor, "take care of the corpse in the room over there. That's all the payment you'll get for your vile liquor to-night. You hear, you escaped convict from Caledonia?"

"Very well, monsieur."

He smiled and smirked and vigorously wiped the counter with his napkin. He was used to such amiable outbursts.



and knew exactly what to do under the circumstances. He knew he would be paid the next day. He would charge them three times more than they owed and they would pay without demurring. He was a sly old dog, Papa Frimoose. No wonder he was buying property and was a big stockholder in the Banque d'Orleans, the Banque des Citoyens and several other local concerns.

"Good-night, robber and extortioner."

Guoneuille zig-zagged toward the door and soon found himself on the sidewalk.

"Where was I going? Oh, yes, to Millistoon's."

He hailed a cab and laboriously climbed inside.

"Where does monsieur wish to go?" asked the driver.

"To the devil."

"Very well, monsieur."

He was accustomed to the vagaries of the sports of the period. He mounted his box and for nearly three hours drove slowly about town. He presently heard a tremendous commotion inside the cab. He stopped, opened the door and looked inquiringly inside.

"Has monsieur called?"

"I have been trying to attract your attention for the past thousand years, you cut-throat. Haven't we reached Millistoon's yet?"

"Does monsieur mean the artist?"

"Of course, you thick-skull. Do you think I meant the morgue keeper?"

"Monsieur will pardon my contradicting him, but he gave me no instructions. He got into the cab at seven o'clock and immediately fell asleep. I did not wish to disturb monsieur. It is now after midnight."

Guoneuille had in reality been asleep only three hours,



having been in the cab since about ten o'clock; but a drunken man's memory keeps no clock.

"Well then, make up for lost time and drive me to Millistoon's."

They were only half a block from the artist's house, but, by making detours and driving slowly, it was half an hour before the cab reached its destination.

"Here you are, monsieur." Then, as the young man showed no disposition to pay him: "Shall I wait here, monsieur?"

"You can wait till Judgment Day."

"As you wish, monsieur. Wake me up when you are ready."

He entered the cab and made himself comfortable. He had driven fiacres in Paris before coming to America and knew a good customer when he saw him. An all-night job was certainly worth twenty dollars.

Guoneuille surveyed the building for a few minutes and catching hold of the ponderous iron-knocker which served the purpose of bell, let it fall back with reverberant noise upon the door. A head was thrust out of a second-story window.

"Is that you, Minette?"

"No, it's Guoneuille. I say, Millistoon, are you drunk?"

"No, but it's undeniable that you are. Go away, Guoneuille."

"What—you drive me away from your door?"

He was half-sobbing.

"For God's sake go away, Guoneuille."

For answer, Guoneuille took hold of the knocker and made enough noise to wake up the dead.

"If you don't open the door instantly, I'll summon as-



sistance and batter it down."

Millistoon knew it was useless to argue.

"All right," he vociferated. "Keep quiet. I'm coming."

He came down and unbolted the door. He was still in evening dress.

"Hello! Haven't gone to bed yet?"

The sight of his friend dressed as he had left the Absinthe House, sobered him instantly.

"You are not going away to-night?" he said, brokenly.

Millistoon looked pale and wan.

"No; come in. I'll tell you all."

He suppressed a sob and convulsively clasped his friend's hand as they slowly and silently ascended the stairs, as solemn as if they were about to enter a mortuary chamber.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### MILLISTOON'S AWAKENING.

They were both sober now. Millistoon, in an outburst of confidence, told Guoneuille everything: how he had found Minette; his plans for her redemption; his wild dream of a happy, alluring future. All this was dispelled now. When he returned home from Papa Frimoose's, he found the following note from Minette:

"I've gone on a drunk with Pierre. I'll be back before morning."

And he had been waiting ever since for her return.

"And to think that if I had not gone to the Absinthe House, all this would never have happened."

Guoneuille had a sudden inspiration.

"She probably got into a scrape," he said. "Perhaps she is in jail. Suppose we go and search for her?"

"At this time? Look, it's almost two o'clock."

"I have a cab waiting at the door. We will probably find her at Jiguet's."

A drowning man clutches at a straw. Millistoon, in his despair, saw probable salvation in Guoneuille's suggestion.

"It will do no harm to try to find her, anyhow," he said, feebly.

They woke up the cab-driver and went to Jiguet's.



They inquired about Minette.

"She has not been around since that night she stole from me," remarked Mere Jiguette. "I think she made a rich haul, for Paul has been coming here every time he gets out of jail and spends money like a prince. But he is as dumb as an oyster when I ask him about Minette. I am sorry, messieurs. Perhaps Paul could tell you. He ought to be here by this time. He is late. If you—"

But they had no time to listen to the voluble dame's talk. They went to the police station. Oh, yes—they knew Minette well. They had not seen her for a long while. Paul was arrested now and then for being drunk; but it was more to sober him up, as the boy was harmless and had never offended the majesty of the law. The sergeant would put his best men to look for the girl and would report to monsieur's house in an hour or two. Monsieur could go home and rest assured that the matter would be well attended to. Oh no, he would not think of accepting money for himself—but he had so many little tots and thanked monsieur in their name.

So the pair returned home. They did not go to bed, but sat and smoked in silence as the hours slowly dragged by.

Morning dawned—morning in the quaint old town, with its deserted streets, its few stragglers and still fewer early risers. A cab suddenly turned the corner and stopped in front of Millistoon's house.

"It's Minette," cried Millistoon.

He rushed to the window just in time to see the cab door swinging to and fro on its hinges. Someone had already alighted and he heard heavy footfalls coming up the stairs. The door was suddenly pushed open and Minette staggered into the room, dragging Paul behind her.



"Minette!"

It was Millistoon's voice—the voice of a man whose heart is breaking.

"Here I am, old fel," leered the girl, lurching like a small boat in a heavy sea. "I tried hard to be a lady, but it wouldn't work. You can't cut a diamond out of a cobblestone, old fel." Then, sobering up a little: "But you were good to me and I wanted to part friends. And those big dinners and those fine dresses! But I can't give up Paul and have saved enough money to keep us drunk for three months. Good-bye, old fel."

"If you are not out of here in two minutes," he said; "I'll call the police."

At the mention of the word "police," Paul immediately woke up from his semi-lethargy and began violently tugging at his companion's sleeve. She silently obeyed the impulse and they shambled the stairs, into the street and were whirled away by the same cab that had brought them a few minutes before.

Guoneuille walked to the window and watched the cab as it swiftly disappeared from view.

"You are a great deal more of a man than I thought," he said, shaking his friend warmly by the hand. "I hope this will be the last of the girl. I give you my word of honor I will never breathe a word of this to a living soul, not even Chainarre."

"Thank you, Guoneuille. Yes, I am done with her forever. What more could one expect from a child of the slums?"

Guoneuille silently pressed his hand and went his way, pondering over the frailty of human nature and the mysterious vagaries of the human mind.



## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE FLIGHT TO EUROPE.

On the same evening of the day of Minette's fall from grace, Millistoon, Guoneuille and Chainarre were seated, as of old, in the Absinthe House. Toasts of "Here's to the prodigal's return" had been of such frequent occurrence, that Chainarre was fast asleep and Guoneuille was alternately dozing and talking to himself or making speeches to imaginary audiences, as was his custom when in his cups. Millistoon had seemed to be drinking recklessly, but in reality he had imbibed very little. His heart was sore. He could not help thinking of Minette. Guoneuille suddenly raised his head and putting his elbows on the table, rested his face between the palms of his hands and looked fixedly at Millistoon.

"Do you know what I was thinking about?" he remarked.

"Absinthe," promptly responded the artist.

"No; I was cogitating about the age of the world."

"I'll admit it is pretty old, but I never took the trouble to make any computation."

"I am astonished at your dense ignorance, and the lack of interest you display—astonished and pained. Do you know



that the world has long since passed its one billionth anniversary?"

Millistoon, who knew from past experience what a bore Guoneuille was when in an argumentative mood, arose and wearily said:

"I have no doubt Chainarre will enjoy your harangue hugely. I feel sleepy and am going home."

Guoneuille caught him by the sleeve of his coat.

"But Millistoon, you must listen. That idiot will never understand me. Do sit down."

He was so comically serious, that Millistoon, to humor him, did as requested. Guoneuille resumed:

"The age of the world is a subject of intense and unfathomed interest. Its computation has been a labor of love for me. Going back ages and ages and assuming that the average rate of denundation in past geological epochs did not materially differ from what it is at present, and that the total quantity of stratified rock would, if uniformly spread over the whole globe, form a layer 1,000 feet in thickness, we have a total period of 1,000 multiplied by six thousands, multiplied by four, or 24,000,000 years. Do you follow?"

"O yes; it is as clear as Bayou St. John mud."

"I am glad to know you intelligently grasp my meaning. These 24,000,000 years, however, only represent the time necessary to deposit the rocks—"

"What rocks, Guoneuille?"

"The stratified rocks, of course, you numskull. Don't interrupt me with silly questions. As I said, these years only represent the time necessary to deposit the rocks which have been formed by denundation from older rocks and these again from rocks of still greater antiquity."



"Which are older—the rocks, the other rocks, the older rocks, or the world?"

"The world, idiot; how could the rocks be resting on the surface of the world if the world had not emerged from chaos first?"

"Oh, yes. I understand now."

"An imbecile would grasp my meaning quicker. Now, assuming that the stratified rocks passed three times through denudation, we have a period of 72,000,000 years—three times 24,000,000, you know."

"Yes—yes. Go on. The denouement must be horribly fascinating."

"You will see how beautifully simple my theory is: Calculating from the observed thickness of the rocks down to the miocene tertiary and assuming a period of 8616 years for each foot deposited on the ocean bed—"

"I don't remember you mentioning the ocean before."

"Your mediocre mind should have surmised that the ocean must have been there all the time. As I was saying, calculating on the above basis, a period of 1,526,750,000 rocks—I mean years. No, it must be rocks, not years. Let me think it over."

He thought the matter over so long, that he was soon snoring like a calliope, to Millistoon's relief.

"Here's my chance to escape," thought the artist. "The mystery of the age of the world and its stratified rocks must remain in eternal abeyance, so far as I am concerned."

He quietly arose and left the cafe. As he entered the hallway of his home, he heard the patter of light feet and saw a feminine form coming down the dimly-lighted stairway. Before he had recovered from his surprise, he was



clasped in a convulsive embrace.

"Oh, Max, my own, my darling! Forgive your foolish little Minette!"

Millistoon with difficulty disengaged himself from the girl's arms and stood looking at her with wonder and indignation.

"Minette," he at last said. "Didn't I forbid you to come back here. Go—instantly."

How radiantly beautiful she was! All traces of the night's debauch were gone. She was as fresh as a rose, as elegant as a countess.

"You do not mean it, Max?"

She burst into tears. Millistoon hesitated, wavered—and then took her in his arm and carried her upstairs as he would a baby. He placed her in a chair and looked fondly at her.

"Do you know how bad you have been?" he said, looking at her as one in a dream. "Do you know that you nearly broke my heart? I will take you back on one condition: That you swear that you will never have anything more to do with Paul and that you will never leave me. You must take such a terrible oath, that you will be afraid to break it." He paused, then resume: "Say after me: '*I swear that I will always be faithful to Maxime Millistoon and never leave him for others, till death doth us part. If I am false to my vow, may my soul writhe in hell for all eternity. I promise this before Almighty God.*' Say this, Minette."

She repeated after him, word for word.

"Tell me how you came to go out with Paul," said Millistoon, as they sat around the supper table, feasting and joking.



"I was looking out of the window, when Paul passed on the other side of the street. He looked at me and rubbed the back of his hand across his eyes, like a man who wants to make sure he is not dreaming. Then an astonished look came into his face. He looked so ragged and miserable, that I felt sorry for him."

"He can very well dress decently," put in Millistoon. "I send him ten dollars every week. That is enough for a gamin."

"He must spend it all for drink. That's the way Paul is. As I was saying, I felt sorry for him and made a sign to him and as he crossed the street, I threw him my purse. It was almost full of silver pieces. He picked it up quickly and thrusting the hand which held the prize in the bosom of his blouse, dodged between the passing vehicles and was gone. Late in the evening, he came back. He was tipsy, almost drunk. I told him he could not come in, but he begged so hard that I relented and went to the door to see him. Then, all of a sudden, I felt like being wicked once more. I scrawled that note to you and ran out of the house, just as I was. And we had a rum time of it. Moved by some queer impulse, we wanted to tell you goodbye. That's why we came here this morning. After you put me out, I went to sleep and when I woke up, I repented and felt ashamed and humiliated. I got rid of Paul and went to the Cathedral and, kneeling before the altar, promised God to be good in future; to give up drinking; to give up my fast life; to give up Paul—yes, even Paul, for he tempts me and I cannot resist. Then I came here to beg your forgiveness, but you were not at home. I refreshed myself, put on my prettiest dress and have been waiting for you ever since.—Do you forgive me?"



"You are already forgiven. And suppose I had refused to take you back, would you have returned to Paul and your old life?"

"No; I would have kept my word. I may be wayward, but I cannot lie to God. I would have gone to the good Ursulines Nuns and asked them to take me."

"And should you find some one who offers you his protection, would you always be faithful to him?"

"If he married me—yes."

"I'll run the risk, Minette."

Minette gently drew back.

"You?" she asked, in wonder. "But your parents? They will drive me away from their door."

"I was an only child and my parents are dead. Since I took you away from the slums, your associates have forgotten you. I will take you to Paris, send you to some good convent for a year, at the end of which time I will marry you. No one need know your history. Two, three or four years from now, I can take you back to New Orleans. No one will recognize in Maxime Millistoon's wife the waif of Mere Jiguet's dance hall. I'll ship Paul to Australia or Africa. If by some mischance your identity is revealed, I will defend you against the world. Love never finds a burden that it does not try to lift. A ship leaves for Havre this evening. Are you willing to go with me?"

Minette passed her arms around his neck and kissed him on both cheeks.

"You are indeed the most noble-hearted man in creation," she said, simply. "I would follow you to the end of the world."

That evening, as Millistoon did not show up at the



Absinthe House, Guoneuille went to his apartments to hunt him up. The house was closed, not a ray of light being visible anywhere. After knocking for half an hour and receiving no response, he gave up the task and returned to Papa Frimoose's, where he found Chainarre fast asleep, his hand tightly clutching the empty absinthe decanter.

"No entertainment in this direction," thought Guoneuille. "I'll go to the Cercle. I might find Dumont and Millistoon there."

Dumont was there. As soon as he saw Chainarre, he said:

"There's a letter about three feet thick in the box for you. I think it's from Little Marianne, reproaching you for neglecting her."

For everybody knew that Little Marianne, the shopkeeper of Rue St. Ann, was deeply in love with the erratic artist.

Guoneuille rang for a porter.

"Bring that letter that's in the office for me."

When the missive was brought to him, he wondered at its bulkiness. Then he became deathly pale and his hand trembled so, he could hardly break the seal. He had recognized Millistoon's handwriting.

He read the voluminous document—which consisted of twelve pages of closely-written foolscap—with increasing wonder and agitation. It was from Millistoon. He told him of Minette's return, of his having forgiven her, of his flight to Europe and reminded him of his promise of secrecy. Guoneuille read the letter over a second time, held it over the gas jet a few moments and then threw



the document into the fireplace.

"Idiot," he muttered to himself. "What a fool a man becomes when he falls into the meshes of a scheming, unprincipled woman. I wager she will desert him inside of a year and come back here to Paul, with all his money and jewels." Then philosophically: "It's his business, anyhow. Give me an optimist, every time. It is only those who look at cobwebs who see spiders everywhere. As for me, so long as absinthe is manufactured, I'll keep away from women—except Marianne.—I say, Dumont, come with me to Papa Frimoose's?"

"Well, I don't mind, for the sake of old times. Did the little Marianne scold much?"

"Oh, yes," observed Guoneuille, carelessly. "But she must get used to see me every other day now. By the way, did I ever tell you how I became acquainted with little Marianne?"

"Never. Is it a romance?"

"Quite. It began ten years ago and will end in my making a fool of myself. I seriously intend to marry the girl—some day. When we get to Papa Frimoose's, I'll tell you the story. It would make the plot for an immortal play."

"With you as the hero?"

"I should say so."

"And the heroine?"

"Little Marianne, you dullard."

Dumont slapped his friend on the shoulder and laughed merrily.

"I beg pardon. I thought perhaps it might be—Mlle. Absinthe."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Guoneuille. "That's a good one



on me. Well, let us go and woo the seductive damosel.—  
On to the Absinthe House!”

And they left the *Cercle* arm in arm, singing the following ditty as they wended their way through the narrow streets of the Bohemian quarter of the town:

’Twas almost dawn.

I saw him stroll

A victim of

The flowing bowl,

A man who thought

Of home sweet home,

Since there was no

Place else to roam.

He was at pains

To navigate;

Much like a cork-

Screw was his gait,

As in the mid-

Dle of the road

He ambled with

His maudlin load.

The East grew red

With rosy light,

And as I gazed

Upon the sight,

I heard him mur-

Mur with a sigh:

“The morn is broke—

And so am I!”

Blanche—Blanche! If you could see your lambkin  
now, what would you say?



## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE STORY OF LITTLE MARIANNE.

Old Frimoose was overjoyed to see "that good Monsieur Dumont" once more in his accustomed place and was all smiles and attention. Chainarre was in the same position Guoneuille had left him two hours previous, fast asleep.

"I would like to hear the story you promised me," said Dumont, feeling that something good was in store for him, for Guoneuille, when sober, was a splendid *raconteur*.

"It was a cold, biting Saturday night in January, ten years ago," began Guoneuille. "I was comfortably seated in my den at the office, having completed my work, when I was aroused from my quietude by a shrill whistle from the speaking tube. I impatiently jumped to my feet, annoyed by being disturbed so suddenly and vociferated back:

"'Well, what is it?'

"'Go at once to the head of St. Philip street. A woman has just been murdered at the Blue Light Saloon.'

"The Blue Light Saloon was then one of the toughest places in town. It was located on the levee at the head of the French Market. Nearly every night a disturbance of



some sort happened within this long, dingy, rambling structure. Now and then somebody was robbed or foully murdered in this den, but the proprietor had a big political pull, was liberal with his money whenever somebody in authority came around on an investigating tour, and the orgies were tolerated under the very eyes of the police.

"When I reached the place, I was told the usual story—the woman had quarreled with her husband because he had refused to give her money for household expenses, and she had caught him spending it for drink and gambling it away, although he knew that the children were starving at home and that the last lump of coal, the last piece of firewood, had been consumed the day before. She had abused him, struck him in her anger and he had brutally knocked her down and stabbed her through the heart. When the police came in to arrest him, he was too stupidly drunk to offer any resistance, and he had been taken to prison and locked up before he could realize the enormity of his offense.

"I was leaving the saloon when I was stopped at the door by a tiny bit of humanity, who mournfully asked me for a nickel 'to buy something to eat, mister.' I was in a hurry to get back to the office and write up the tragedy, but something in those big brown eyes looking so appealingly into my face deterred me, and I stopped and patted her tangled mass of golden hair.

"She was a child of six, but old beyond her years. Her face looked so pale and pinched that one who did not see her slender figure would not have believed it to belong to a child.

"I read the story at a glance: It was a tale of suffering in one of the many tenements in which the poor are



crowded like sheep in a car; where the sun never streams in some of the windows; where darkness is ever present in most of the rooms; where men sit down and think and think and curse the poverty which oppresses them; where women silently weep and children cry for bread—all was understood as I looked at that wee, pitiful face upraised appealingly to mine.

“I gave the child a dime—all the money I had, for I was then a poor struggling devil of a reporter—and hurried back to the office.

“‘I thought they had garroted you down there,’ remarked the city editor, as I rushed into the office. ‘Hurry up and get your copy ready, as the first form has already gone to press.’

“My pencil fairly flew over the paper as I minutely detailed the murder, and the poor little waif, with her sorrowful eyes and hunger-pinched cheeks, was soon banished from my thoughts. We see too much every day to remember trifling incidents.

“One day, in the following January, while investigating a complaint which had been made at the office about the ill-treatment of slaves belonging to the malodorous Madame Langpalle, whose fame as a monster is still fresh and vigorous, I noticed a wistful face at the upper window of a poverty-stricken home. A smile of recognition lighted the pallid features when I looked up and I recognized the little tot I had befriended a few weeks previously.

“Who was she? One of God’s worms—one out of a thousand in this great town of ours, whose woes and anxieties, whose joys and sorrows, are seldom known to any but Him.

“I would gladly have chatted with her, but I only had



enough change to pay for a ride back to the office in the omnibus, and I had not the heart to go up those steep, dingy steps, and enter that desolate room without giving her something to lighten her burdened life. But I would not go without a smile and a handwave to let her know that I recognized her; that of the hundreds who passed up and down the noisy street, there was one thinking of the pale little prisoner and losing his sense of selfishness as he flitted to and fro in the crowd. She waved her hand and smiled in return, and I knew we were both happier.

"It was two or three weeks before I had occasion to go to the locality I had previously visited. I then suddenly thought of my little friend and concluded to pay her a visit. As I reached the top of the insecure stairs, I overheard the following conversation:

"'When will the spring time come, mother?'

"'Soon, my child.'

"'And when spring comes, shall I hear the robin sing?'

"'I—I hope so.'

"It was the child whose face I had seen at the window and she could no longer leave her bed. Through the half-open door, I could see everything. It was a room in which everything told of want; a mother whose haggard face and faded dress told of constant toil to keep the wolf away. There was lack of food, fuel, bedding—of everything needed to make that place, sarcastically called 'home,' endurable to any one but a worm.

"I made a slight noise to attract the attention of the woman. She gave a little cry of alarm on seeing me at the threshold and said, gruffly:

"'Well, what do you want?'

"Just then the little girl caught sight of me and her



pallid face brightened.

“‘Oh, mamma, he won’t hurt you?’ she said, in joyous tones. ‘It is the good man who gave me a dime that day we did not have any coal. I saw him passing down the street the last day I sat at the window and invited him to come and see me. Tell him to come in and sit down near me.’”

“‘I beg you a thousand pardons for my rudeness, kind sir,’ said the woman, advancing toward me. ‘This tenement is so crowded with drunken men and quarrelsome people, that I thought you wanted to do us harm. Sit down near Marianne. She often speaks of you.’”

“She spoke in a way which certainly proved her to be above the lowly element which surrounded her on every side. What a difference in tone, manner and demeanor between her apologetical explanation, and the first words she had addressed me! There were no chairs in the room, so I sat down at the head of the bed, and took the wasted hand of the little sufferer in my own. It was so thin and light that I had to bend my head and look to see if I really grasped it, and I felt something pulling at my heart-strings, as I gently said:

“‘Are you glad to see me, dear?’”

“‘Oh, ever so much, mister! You are the first one who ever was good to me. Every night I pray for you, and ask God to bless you and make you rich.’”

“‘Poor, little thing,’ observed the mother, ‘she thinks that to be rich, to have money jingling in your pockets and be able to buy everything you like, is the acme of happiness on earth. Little she knows what crimes are daily committed for the joy of being dazzled by the glitter of gold.’”

“I was struck by her choice expressions and remarked:”



“Pardon me, madame, but how came you to be among these people? From your conversation, I adduce the fact that you are educated and have certainly moved in higher circles. Please do not consider my question impertinent; I am warranted to ask it by the glaring contrast between your surroundings and your apparent refinement.’

“‘I do not consider your question out of place, sir; but I beseech you not to insist upon an explanation; at least, not to-day.’

“For the first time since I came into the room, she looked me full in the face. The last rays of the setting sun were struggling through the sashless window, and shone directly upon her face. As I became accustomed to the semi-gloom which surrounded us, and our eyes met, my temples throbbed irregularly, and a vague feeling of wonderment possessed me. I had certainly seen that face before; but where, when and under what circumstances, was indistinct to my memory; and those eyes! There could be no mistake. They had gazed into mine before. Of this I felt as certain as I did of the existence of a Supreme Being.

“‘Have we not met before, madame?’ I hazarded.

“‘Not that I remember, sir. Perhaps we met on the street. I earn what I sarcastically call *my living* by sewing for a dry goods store, and every other day I walk up Conde street to deliver the work I have done and get a few cents to keep myself and child from actual starvation. Perhaps you are a lawyer and met me on your way to the Cabildo.’

“But I could not remember any such meeting. The fancied resemblance between the features of this poor woman and a face I had seen somewhere in the past was merely a trick of my naturally romantic imagination; so,



to dismiss the subject, I laughingly said:

“‘Well, this is perhaps the case. I meet so many people in the practice of my profession.’

“‘So you are a lawyer, then?’

“‘Yes, madame; at your service.’

“She smiled sadly.

“‘Thank you, sir; but I prefer thinking of you as a friend than as a professional man.’

“I had lied purposely in telling her I was a lawyer—I was becoming interested in the little sufferer and her surroundings, and was afraid my prospects would be jeopardized were I to admit that I wrote for L’Abeille. Experience had taught me that people were always on their guard in the presence of a newspaperman, though I can’t see why they should be afraid of us.

“During our conversation, Marianne had fallen asleep, her hand trustingly abandoned in mine. I gently disengaged my grasp and placed a quarter in the hollow palm. The slender fingers closed tightly around the silver piece, but the child still slept.

“‘Come and see us again, kind sir,’ said Marianne’s mother, as she bade me good-bye at the door. ‘My poor little girl is so happy when she sees you.’

“I promised to return and went down the grimy stairs. In front of the tenement were half a dozen dirty-faced children romping about and pelting each other with mud-pies. Owing to my dexterity in dodging, my nose escaped receiving a thump from one of those soft missiles directed at a tow-headed boy of about seven, who stood near the entrance. My presence put a sudden stop to the battle and the urchins scampered away, with the exception of the tow-headed boy, who seemed too surprised at my sudden



exit to do anything.

“‘Here is my chance to learn something about our mysterious dame above,’ I thought; then, addressing the boy: ‘Can you tell me the name of the lady who lives at the head of the stairs, my boy?’

“‘Naw,’ was the laconic reply.

“‘I highly appreciate your politeness, my little man,’ I resumed, sarcastically, ‘and am astonished at the unfathomed fund of information you possess.’ Seeing the comical look of astonishment on his face, I added, coaxingly: ‘Why can’t you tell me her name?’

“‘‘Cause she ain’t got any.’

“‘She has no name? What do you call her?’

“‘We calls her bughouse, ’cause she’s allus mopin’ an’ never talks to people. Se’s too stuck-up to talk wid folkses. She’s ’ristocrat, she is—Say, mister; got a siggeroot?’

“I had a cigar in my pocket and gave it to him. The little fellow hardly came up to my elbow, but I knew it could not do him any harm. Among these people, boys have the vices of men before they are out of short pants.

“I took the habit of stopping every evening at Marianne’s humble home and bringing her some dainties. My donations were limited to delicacies ranging in value from five cents to twenty-five cents; but the great improvement which was already noticeable in the child’s condition proved that it was only the lack of the bare necessities of life which had caused the fragile flower to wither and grow weaker as the days sped on. The mother also looked happier. There was always some one to stay with the invalid now. For, the days that she had to go to her employer’s, I remained with the child, told her stories, and listened to her interesting chatter. She was bright and knowing be-



yond her years. Among other things, she told me why she longed to hear the robin sing. The summer before, she had gone with some companions to the Place d'Armes, and there seen a robin red-breast, and listened spell-bound to its joyous notes. She only had that pleasure once, but she had ever remembered how gaily he sang.

"She said she knew that she was going to die, but she had no plaint. Only, as the days dragged slowly by, she sometimes prayed God in a whisper when she was alone:

"Let that dear robin come again before I die!"

"At last March came and went, with its chill and blundering winds. April frayed the trees with green and the sunshine grew warmer and more comforting each day. The white-faced child was carried to the window, that she might look out and realize that the glad spring time had come, but she could not yet leave her bed. One balmy day in May, the neighborhood of the Place d'Armes was thrilled with the loud, clear notes of a robin red-breast, who was swinging on the limb of a tree. But the trfills stopped as suddenly as they had begun. The bird seemed to be looking around him in search of something. He hopped about aimlessly and finally flew away. And when next he alighted, it was on the sill of a window on the top floor of a poverty-stricken home; and his feet had scarcely touched it, when his red breast swelled and he began to sing.

"And Marianne, who had been half dreaming all day, lifted up her thin hands and whispered to God:

"The robin has come at last! I cannot see him, but I hear his song and I am ready to go."

"And the red-breast whirled himself about, looked down into the street, across the roofs and windows and sang



again.

“And a whole square away, as the mother was hastening homeward, hoping and fearing and full of anxiety, she caught the notes of the robin’s song and looked up and saw him perched on the sill. A great fear clutched at her breast and she quickened her footsteps. Up one flight—up two—up three—and she threw open the door of her room and cried out:

“‘The robin has come and robbed me of my child! Is she dead, monsieur?’

“‘Far from it, madame. She just sat up in bed to watch the gambols of her little feathered friend, and says she feels as if new life had been infused in her.’

“And while we held up the invalid, so that she could see better into the street, the red-breast was joined by his brown-breast and they half hid themselves among the young, green leaves of May and sang in chorus. And then they flew away with boisterous twitterings, while the overjoyed mother laughed and cried as she pressed her child to her breast.

“But the shadow of death was hovering over the lowly home. The life of the child was spared, but that of the mother was demanded in exchange for the treasured boon. Worn out with ceaseless toil, the poor soul swooned in the street one day. I happened to be at the police station when the woman was brought in and at once recognized her. She opened her eyes and a feeble smile overspread her countenance.

“‘Come nearer, monsieur,’ said she, ‘I want to tell you something before I die.’

“The attending physician and policemen discreetly moved away. They all knew me and saw by my serious



look and troubled countenance that I knew the woman and was about to be entrusted with some family secret.

“‘You have been so good to me and my poor little girl, that I want to tell you a secret which for years and years has weighed me down with sorrow. I feel I am going to die, and I confide Marianne to your care. She is the only legacy I can leave—a legacy to me more precious than all the riches of this world. Will you swear, by the memory of your dead parents, to protect my child from the lurking dangers of life? Oh, kind sir, guard her against the fate which often awaits the child of poverty, which drags the soul to the lowest depths and makes the erring one the toy of mankind. Do you promise?’

“‘I do; but tell me who are her parents?’

“‘Yes—yes, and I must hurry, for I feel the end is near. I come of an old, proud Louisiana family, kind sir. My father’s name is—oh, my heart. Give me some water—quick!’

“She gasped, closed her eyes, and her poor soul took its flight to a happier home beyond the stars.

“My first move, after seeing that the poor woman was decently interred, was to take little Marianne away from her pestiferous surroundings. I put her in charge of the good sisters of the Ursulines Convent. But it was a long time before the poor thing was able to go about and the attending physician advised the nuns that it would be harmful if she were to study too hard. So she was given a simple course in light studies, for she had been used too long to want and drudgery and her mind could not grapple with mathematics, history or grammar; but she was bright and willing to learn other things and soon became an expert in fancy needle-work and sewing.



“At first, I was proud of my ward and watched with unabated interest the roses coming to her cheeks and the fragile little thing gradually bloom into a plump and healthy young miss; but as the years rolled by and the time approached for her to leave the convent, I wondered what I would do with her. I was beginning to like her too much and felt downhearted and morose whenever I thought that one of these days some enterprising young fellow would fall in love with her and take her away from me. Sometimes, in the secrecy of my room, when these thoughts came to me, a great pain surged at my heart, and I aspired to punch somebody’s head—that somebody being no other person than the fellow who might make love to little Marianne. What a simpleton I was to have grown so fond of that slip of a girl! It was ridiculous to assume that she would ever care for me. In her immature mind, I was merely her *Parrain*—as she delighted to call me—her guardian, her benefactor, almost her father, and it would be awkward, out of place and ungenerous on my part to arrogate myself the rights of a lover. She would, perhaps, mistaking gratitude for love, consent to become my wife, and when she would one day meet the one she was destined to adore, we would both be miserable to the end of our lives.

“I had, indeed, a troublesome legacy on my hands. What in the world would I do with the girl when her convent life would be over? I had no parents to take her to, living in bachelor apartments and having only distant relatives in the city, and I was yet too young a man to install her as my housekeeper. It would not be proper, and the gossips would ceaselessly wag their tongues from morning till night. I also noticed that a steady change was taking



place in Marianne's conduct toward me. In the beginning, whenever I called at the convent, which was about every month, she used to rush out to greet me and throw herself in my arms with an abandon which showed what a trusting and innocent heart she possessed; but as her dresses lengthened, and her little head grew a few feet nearer the sky, she met my embraces with a shy reserve and hung down her head and blushed furiously whenever I complimented her on her beauty or accomplishments. On one occasion her embarrassment was so apparent when I pressed a kiss on her lips, that I could not help observing:

"'Are you displeased with me, Marianne? Have I done anything to offend you? Speak, my little pet.'

"Her lips quivered and she falteringly answered:

"'I feel so funny when you kiss me. I told the good sisters about it, and they said I should stop kissing you; but—' and here she passed her arms around my neck and put her head on my shoulder in the old, familiar way she used to do in the past; 'but it is so hard for me to do so! You have been so good to me—so good to my poor mamma. And yet the nuns say it is a sin if I kiss you, and the priest scolds me and gives me a whole string of beads to repeat every time I go to confession.'

"I looked into her eyes and the whole world seemed to fade from view. I forgot my resolve; I forgot everything—I only saw those tear-wet eyes looking straight into mine; that pure, innocent face, pink with emotions the child could not understand; those rich, red lips pursed in a rebellious pout, and I felt that we were both basking in the delicious trance of love's soulful influence. I strained her to my bosom and kissed her lips again and again.

"'Oh, please stop—please let me go,' she pleaded, striv-



ing to free herself. 'If one of the sisters should come in here, I would be expelled from the convent.'

"I released her and looked sheepishly at her, like a schoolboy caught doing something wrong. I must indeed have looked very comical, for the girl burst out laughing.

"'O, but you look funny, my dear *Parrain*,' she said, arranging my hair with her dainty hand and straightening my tie. Then, in a serious tone: 'But I don't want you to kiss me any more like you just did, because—'

"'Because you love me,' I added, having regained my composure.

"'Love you?' she repeated, looking at me in sincere wonder. 'And what is love, after all? The nuns never allow me to read love stories; but my room-mate, Nelita Chouchoutte, showed me a few passages in a book she had some time ago, and I thought it was so nice. Tell me, *Parrain*, what is love?'

"'Come and sit near me, on this sofa, and I'll tell you, little pet.'

"'You promise you won't kiss me?'

"'I do.'

"'Honestly, now?'

"'Honestly.'

"She sat beside me and I began:

"'Love is a gift sent direct from Heaven, little one. When one is in love, the sun seems to shine with more splendor; the winds pause to whisper sweet tales from worlds beyond the stars; the leaves in the scented forest dare not stir, lest their rustling should disturb the lovers' train of thoughts; the streamlet sings on merrily to the sea; the birds twitter melodiously and flit noiselessly about; the skies are beautiful and cloudless; the whole world



seems to be in the embrace of eternal springtime, of immortal joy, peace, purity and happiness.'

"I had taken hold of her hand, which remained unresistingly in mine. Giving it a gentle pressure, I resumed:

"Take our case, for example. Without knowing it, I have awakened in your pure heart a sentiment strangely sweet, tender and irresistible. The delicious sadness which lurks in your eyes when I kiss your pouting lips enthralls me and I feel that life without you would be an eternity of despair. I long, with a yearning which oppresses and pains me, to look into your heart, to know if you really love me as fervently as I adore you and whether you say with me: "Thou, or no one."'"

"She did not reply. Her eyes were intently fixed on the carpet and she seemed lost in thought. She presently looked up and said:

"When one is constantly thinking about another, does that mean she is in love?"

"I presume so,' I replied, amused at the drollness of her question.

"Then I must love you, for I am always thinking about you.'

"The innocent frankness of her confession charmed me. In utter violation of my promise, I caught her in my arms and showered passionate kisses upon her warm, unresisting lips.

"You are not a man of your word,' she said, disengaging herself and moving away from me; 'but I suppose that is the way all lovers do, and I forgive you.'

"Hearing a step outside, I bid her good-bye. As I wended my way home, I knew that God had willed that our hearts should be mated and felt that all the sunshine



would be taken away from my life were I to lose my legacy.

"Ten years had passed since the day I met the forlorn waif near the Blue Light Saloon and contributed my mite toward alleviating her sufferings. The time for Marianne to leave the Ursulines Convent was only a few weeks off. She was sixteen now. I was in a dilemma what to do with the girl. We were engaged to be married, but as my bank account was limited to twenty-two dollars and some odd cents, hardly enough to go housekeeping, I saw no hope of kneeling at Hymen's altar for at least a year to come. So I thought the best thing to do was to bring her to live with my old friends, Papa and Mamam Oujatte. The old folks were delighted, being childless and rapidly getting daft for the want of something besides their store to occupy their minds, and they opened a nondescript adjunct to their place of business and put Marianne in charge. Last year they made a present of the little shop to Marianne as a New Year's gift and the girl is happy and prosperous. Oh, but she is a babbler! She is called the second edition of L'Abeille, for she knows everything, and what she does not know, her vivid imagination supplies. She would make an ideal reporter. She is proud of me, Mil-listoon—yes, proud and contented—and boasts to everybody that she will soon be my wife. Well, my story is ended. The romance, begun amid poverty and squalor is still as sweet, as alluring and delightful as it was ten years ago."

"How old is the girl now?"

"Twenty."

"And during the four years which have gone by since you took her away from convent, has your bank account remained stationary?"



"No; it has dwindled, until it is now a thing of the past. Absinthe and fast living did it."

"But you say Marianne has a prosperous business. Her industry and your salary should suffice for two to live comfortably enough."

Guoneuille straightened up and scornfully replied:

"Do you think I want a woman to support me?"

"No, but it is better than to remain betrothed indefinitely and have people talking about you. It is selfish, unkind, unnatural. The girl is young and pretty and might find a thousand suitors—"

Guoneuille jumped to his feet.

"What? A thousand devils! I'll kill them, everyone of them. You are a fool, Dumont."

"I did not mean any harm," remarked Dumont, sorry that he had unintentionally offended his friend. "Come, now, let's talk this matter over quietly and dispassionately. Her parents—have you ever heard anything about them?"

"Not a syllable. I think she is the daughter of an exiled Bourbon prince. But—Zut! Were she the offspring of a rag-picker, my sentiments would remain unchanged."

"Nobly spoken, Guoneuille. Remember, I must be your best man when the auspicious event takes place."

"Thanks. It will happen, Dumont—some day, when I learn to behave myself and to love Marianne better than I do absinthe. Papa and Mamam Oujatte have promised to give the girl her dowry, so, you see, we won't start bankrupts. Let us celebrate."

He gave an order which almost took Papa Frimoose's breath away, used as he was to the vagaries and capacity of his guests. And when he had filled the glasses to the brim, he rose to his feet and assuming a pose which would



have aroused the envy of a Demosthenes, delivered the following remarkable toast:

“I am a poet, a dreamer, an apostle of infinity. The future? Snip! There is no such thing as to-morrow. I sing of love, of joy, of life, of death—all in the same breath. What does it matter? I am wedded to my rhyme for all time to come. To-day I live—I breathe the pure air of love; to-morrow is veiled in darkness and dread—and may never come. Here’s to the glorious present; here’s to Marianne and love; here’s to poetry, song, good cheer—and absinthe!”

Dumont applauded and cheered and woke up Chainarre, who, seeing his friends in such high spirits, immediately began clapping his hands and yelling, only stopping when the absinthe bottle was passed to him by the sagacious Guoneuille.

And the sun was high in the heavens when the revelers were sent home in carriages by Papa Frimoose.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE HEART OF A MAN.

We must now leave our Bohemian friends for a while and see how Lolotte and Lucien have fared since the last time we were with them.

Pierre had never returned to the little cottage in Bayou Road. A few weeks after the stormy scene with Lolotte, he had sent for the money he had given the girl to save and she had returned every penny of it. She never mentioned his name and Lucien never even thought about him. Pierre's disappearance was to him as if a candle had been snuffed out amid a myriad wax tapers; as if a drop of water had fallen into the ocean.

There was not much change in the life of the little milliner. She had put aside an old lover for a new and her daily existence was the same. Only, she knew what it was to love now and it was the only thing which made her constant drudgery endurable. She knew that when her work was over, she would see her lover, listen to his inexhaustible fund of pretty phrases and hear him speak again and again of the grand day when she would be his wife and queen over his home. For she had positively refused to allow him to kiss and caress her unless he would agree to marry her. And he, to humor her, had promised.



Dumont sincerely liked his dainty little sweetheart. She was droll, witty and entertaining and her advent into his humdrum life had been a welcome novelty. She amused and interested him. At times, when at work in his studio, musing over the many quaint things she had confided to him the evening before—her joys, sorrows, struggles and privations—something tugged at his heartstrings and he felt certain he really loved the girl. A moment of serious reflection, however, would show him how absurd such a thing would be. He was a patrician, the last scion of a long and distinguished line of ancestry; she was a child of the people and probably did not even know who her parents of the preceding generation were. She was one of those wild flowers which now and then suddenly bloom among the lowly and thrive undefiled amid poverty and squalor; then wither and fade and eventually sink back into the mire from which they sprang.

Yes, he really liked the girl. He meant no harm by his attentions to her. He saw in his wooing only a harmless flirtation—for even if the child did love him now, she would quickly forget him when her infatuation was over and go back to Pierre, who was of her own station in life and would no doubt make her happy.

It is so easy to win the affections of a trusting, confiding girl, yet unlearned in the wiles and snares of this world. A tender glance, a little judicious flattery, a bit of sentimental poetry, a gentle pressure of the hand at the opportune moment, a stolen kiss, a whispered avowal of adoration—and love finds an abiding place in her breast and her inmost thoughts, her most sacred dreams and fancies, are centered upon her ideal.

No wonder then that this neglected child, who had been



accustomed from babyhood to jeers, taunts and drudgery, whose existence had been a constant struggle against want and abject poverty, should look with wistful eyes from the depths in which fate had cast her and shrine this new-found friend, this kind, courteous, chivalrous gentleman, upon an exalted pedestal, as the god of her idolatry.

Ah, little does man know what a prize the love of a pure woman is. Be she high-born or lowly, rich or poor, ignorant or educated, he should deem it an honor to have won her heart and be willing to do all in his power to make her happy and disperse the clouds which gloomily overcast life's ever-changing sky. In his blind conceit, however, after the glamour of love's alluring dream has somewhat paled, he imagines that, no matter what he may do, she will still love him and cling to him, and he goes on breaking the heart he has taught to adore. But what of that? It is only a woman's life blighted, only another chapter added to man's perfidious selfishness and woman's innate confidence and inexplicable fidelity under the most trying circumstances.



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### AFTER THE SERPENT CAME.

Two years glided by. Pierre had never returned; but Lolotte did not miss him, did not even think of him now. She was very happy with her handsome lover. She was as gay and blithe as the nightingale which hopped about the trees in the Place d'Armes, cooing and billing with its brown-eyed mate.

How pure, how sublime is a maiden's love! A writer once said that it was like a rich incense that fills the earth to the cerulean blue above, engulfing the senses into but one reality—the blissful, entrancing present. It is the ambrosial nectar with which God anoints the chalice of fate, tinging the bitter draught with the sweetness of honeydew; at times the gateway to an entrancing future and at others the sole oasis in the desert of blighted hopes, forgotten vows and broken promises.

Every mortal must meet, sooner or later, as he journeys towards the sunset of life, the one who is destined to be the radiant star in his heaven of love, and who shall remain, as the years roll on, the sole object of his inmost thoughts, his true and only ideal of all that is pure, noble and beautiful in life.

To this simple child, this ideal was the man whose soft



tones and suave flatteries had brightened the monotony of her dreary existence and she loved him with a passion whose purity was sincerity grew stronger day by day.

Lolotte's life had always been lonely. She had grown up in the street, played in the gutter, suffered hunger and hardships. She had been sent to school so that she could learn to read and write because she was a pretty child and her father thought that with her white face, blue eyes and golden curls and a little education, she would be able to earn more money than if she was allowed to grow up in ignorance; but her father had been killed in a drunken brawl on the levee when she was fifteen and she had been apprenticed to Madame Vachonette by her mother, who saw in that line of trade a genteel mode of employment for her darling child. She was now nearly twenty. Two years before she met Lucien Dumont, she had been betrothed to Pierre Latour, an honest, sturdy artisan, a skilled workman in the foundry of Lagawoul Freres. They were to be married in the fall of the year in which this story opens and she was happy with her gruff, unlettered lover, asking no other boon in the world but his love and protection—until she met the handsome, courteous, affable gentleman, who had been so kind to her and whose pleadings were irresistible. And then—the serpent came.

It was in the spring of 1830. Lucien used to bring Lolotte such pretty flowers, with which she ornamented her little home.

“From my garden,” he would tell her.

And as they sat and talked of the future, he would promise to take her some day to see this great garden of his, to visit his home and introduce her to his sister as his promised wife; but he never told her who he was, except



that his name was Lucien Dumont and that he was rich enough to live without working. The fact that his name was Dumont was meaningless to Lolotte; it was like any other name. She had never heard of the famous artist, hidden as she was from the busy marts of life.

"Call me Lucien," he had said.

And she, loving and trusting him, was satisfied.

One day, the little milliner's quiet trend of thoughts received a startling shock. She was busily engaged in trimming a bonnet, when Madame Vachonette walked into the workroom and carelessly remarked to the assembled girls:

"Do you know that Monrieur Dumont is getting married?"

Dumont? Why, that was Lucien's family name! Could he have told Madame Vachonette about their engagement? She stole a timid, furtive glance at the modiste, certain to find herself the cynosure of her cold gray eyes; but the madame was standing listlessly in the doorway, looking at no one in particular.

"He is going to marry Mlle. Madeline de St. Croix," she resumed. "They don't seem to be in a hurry, though, for the wedding will only take place next year."

She went back into the front room, leaving the girls to discuss the newsy tidbit among themselves.

Mlle. de St. Croix? That haughty *grande-dame* who was so exacting, so arrogant when she came into the shop to select her hats and capes? No, it could not be her Lucien, for he had only one sweetheart, his Lolotte, his "Little One," as he was fond of calling her.

That evening, when her lover called, she told him what she had heard. He laughed and told her it was his cousin. She believed him and thought no more of the incident.



The Sunday following, Lucien did not come, as was his custom. He came Thursday and explained that he had been ill. But he was not as loving as usual and it was a week before he again called.

Spring and summer dragged by. Autumn, with its blustering winds and chilling breath, was gradually withering the flowers and turning the leaves in the Place d'Armes into yellow, fluttering harbingers of approaching winter.

Lucien came seldom now. He was still kind and good to Lolotte, but she could see that his love was ebbing away. When she taxed him with indifference and raised her limpid blue eyes to his face, he would take her in his arms and swear that he loved her as much as of old and could not come as often on account of his art studies, which kept him busy night and day. He would take her to his sister in a few days, to prove her that he was sincere. But he never did and the weeks dragged on slowly for the poor little milliner.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE LEGEND OF THE BLUE VIOLET.

One night in November, while Lolotte's heart was heavy with sorrow and despair, for it was three weeks since she had seen her lover, she thought of an old tradition of her native Brittany, in which the peasants implicitly believed. It is a quaint, beautiful legend and is told in the following words in the folk-lore of Brittany:

One quiet starlit night in June, the soul of a poet, tired of its stay on earth and seeking rest from care and sorrow, was taken up on a passing flower-scented zephyr from the waving fields of Brittany and carried through space, until it found an abode in a beautiful silver star that looked down on the Magic Garden of the Souls.

In this garden, all the fairest flowers of creation seemed to have been transplanted. Here the pale passion flower, the sweet-breathing honey-suckle, the many-hued roses, the silver clematis, the mignonette and the white stars of the jessamine, added their perfume to that of the orange, lemon, pomegranate and mimosa trees, which bloomed in all their luxuriance. In this magic garden, every blossom was the home of a woman's soul, and breathed forth from their petals the nature of the woman whose soul lived therein.



The night after the soul of the poet had entered the star, there came into the garden a maiden fair, who knelt amid the flowers and gazed long and sadly at the star and then, bowing her head, wept for him she loved so well in life. As the maiden wept, her tears fell upon the ground and the flowers sighed and hung their heads in sympathy and grief. All through the summer months, the maid would come and weep and, as she wept, brighter grew the star, and the flowers wondered. One night, the maiden did not come into the garden as was her custom, and the flowers whispered to each other, and unhappy grew the soul within the star as time passed on and she came no more.

In the early spring, a wondrous thing happened. From the ground, wet by the tears of the maiden who was beloved by the soul within the star, a pure white violet grew, and when the first sweet blossoms opened its petals, into it passed the soul of the gentle girl.

That summer no rain fell for days and days in the Magic Garden of the Souls. Everything grew parched and dry. The flowers drooped and hung their heads and suffered and some that had timorous souls, died. But love that is divine and everlasting can never die, and so it was with the violet who loved and was loved by the star.

One night, a strange thing happened. The star who loved the white violet fell as a drop of dew upon the little flower's breast and the soul of the man and the soul of the maid were blended into one.

In the spring, when the flowers bloomed again and all the air was filled with odors sweet, to the garden was given a new flower, the beautiful blue eyed Parma violet, an emblem of love and hope—the union of the violet and star.

And every Breton maiden knows by heart the invoca-



tion of the *Legend of the Blue Violet*, which runs thus:

"If thou hast a lover and he be false to his vows, if all thy thoughts and all thy love should be centered in him, so that he be to thee more than father or mother, more than brother or sister, and thy heart pineth for him, do this: Take a blue-eyed Parma violet, press it between the leaves of thy missal and when it is dry, grind it into powder and put the dust in a phial, with a lock of thy lover's hair. Then go to the village church at sunset, while the chimes are ringing in commemoration of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary, fill the phial with holy water, murmuring slowly and devoutly the prayers of the Angelus. Then take the phial to the village witch and she will brew thee a potion which thou must make the false one drink and he will love thee faithfully ever afterwards. But take care not to drink the philtre thyself, for if thou tastest even a single drop, thou shalt die."

There were no witches in New Orleans, but there was Peau-d'Or, the great Voudou Queen, and she would go to her. She loved him too much and to lose him would kill her. She had some Parma violets, given her by Lucien when their love was in its zenith. They were in her prayer-book, where she could see them every Sunday when she attended mass.

And that night, while the chill November wind moaned and the heart of a maiden was breaking, slender, trembling fingers ground a blue-eyed violet into powder and put the dust, together with a lock from a false lover's hair, into a phial, wet with the tears from eyes as blue as the tender flower had been when it first felt the kiss of a budding love.



## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE GREAT SNOW STORM OF 1830.

The winter of 1830-31 was of remarkable severity in Louisiana. As early as October, snow had fallen within fifty miles of New Orleans. Louisiana, the land of winter roses and balmy breezes, whose Gulf-kissed zephyrs and tropical verdure has furnished inspiring themes to romancists and poets—suddenly quaked and shivered in the embraces of hoary Boreas, whose icy breath congealed her limpid bayous, her sinuous bays and lagoons and converted the undulating cane fields on the Cotes des Allemands into sterile, desolate wastes.

Snow fell also early in November, but what is known as "The Great Snow Storm" of that year, sent its first fleecy messengers as a warning to the people of the city shortly before noon on the morning of November 26th, 1830.

What excitement there was in easy-going New Orleans. Ever since morning, when the first flakes fluttered aimlessly through the air, the whole population became mad, exhilarated, delirious and business was practically suspended in the myriad of stores which dotted the business section of the town. Even law-abiding Mayor Prieur caught the fever and issued a proclamation, which was cried through the streets, permitting snow-balling; and it is of record



that the old gentleman himself indulged in a fierce snow-battle with the dignified members of the municipal council.

But in the millinery shop presided over by Madame Vachonette, work went on as usual. She had given permission to the six girls in her employ to come to the door for five minutes when the snow first began falling, but they were paid to work and every minute lost in gaping contemplation of the beautiful spectacle, was so much money out of her pocket. So back to the work-room they were admonished to hurry and make up for the precious time wasted. There were bonnets to trim, capes to cut out and stitch for her fastidious clientele and she was already days behind in her orders.

As a great concession, Madame Vachonette permitted the girls to go home at two o'clock that afternoon. The truth was that she was not so sure that the storm would not increase in violence and she wanted to reach her home before the streets became too choked up with snow to allow her carriage to pass by. She had lived in Paris long enough to know that snow storms are not to be trifled with.

As for Lolotte, she looked upon the storm as a blessing of Providence. She had been to the Cathedral the evening before and made the prayers required and filled the phial with holy water, intending to go to the home of the Voudou Queen the coming Sunday. But it was early, only two o'clock, and she had time to go and return before sundown. She knew it was bleak and dreary, in that dismal swamp in the rear of the city, where the Voudous dwelt; where the water-snakes crawled and writhed; where the horned toad sat at eventide and blinked its popping eyes at the



blood-red sun; where the alligator glided cumberously through the foul waters; where the vultures sat like spectral sentinels upon the dwarfish trees, cawing and hooing like a thousand demons if a stranger ventured near.

All this she knew; and yet, to regain the love of a false-hearted man, she would journey to the hellish place.



## CHAPTER XXXI.

### PEAU-D'OR, THE VOUDOU QUEEN.

Two o'clock in the afternoon of November 26th, 1830. A thin-clad figure paused at the threshold of Madame Vachonette's millinery establishment, looking with wonder at the tiny white flakes floating aimlessly in the air.

"It will soon be over," thought little Lolotte. "Madame Vachonette is an alarmist."

She stepped outside and walked briskly up Rue Royal. When she reached Rue St. Pierre, she altered her course and went in the direction of the rear of the city—for it was beyond, in the wilds of the Congo Plains, in the midst of the lataniers, stunted trees and moss-laden willows, that Peau-d'Or, the great Voudou Queen, and her lieutenant, the Big Snake, had their lair. When she reached the Rue des Ramparts, then the furthestmost habitable limits of the city, she shuddered at the thought of crossing the desolate waste of swamp-land beyond the Congo Plains and gathered her thin shawl closer around her shoulders. But she felt the little phial in the pocket of her dress and went on resolutely ahead.

How bleak, how bare, how awesome the swamp was. A



narrow path zig-zagged through the bog, winding like a gigantic snake as far as the eye could reach. It was cut deep with the tread of many, many feet which had passed before; for Peau-d'Or had a great following among the thousands of slaves in the city and held nightly orgies in the shadow of the great oaks on the banks of Bayou St. Jean.

On, on she trudged. The snow was still falling steadily, but gently; only, the wind was cold and piercing and would now and then come whirring and roaring with cruel suddenness over the lonesome swamp.

She had never gone beyond the limits of the City before. Everything seemed strange and awe-inspiring as she glanced fearfully about her. How life-like the *lataniers* looked as they oscillated backward and forward at each fresh gust of wind. They looked like human-headed serpents growing out of the ground, with human arms, long and slimy, writhing like worms, each separate reed keeping a ceaseless undulation from root to top. And the long grasses which bordered the path! They coiled around everything they came in contact with and let it go no more. She felt the wet grass beat against her limbs, trying to wind around them and hold her fast; she saw the *lataniers* bend nearer and nearer towards her, the hideous black heads bobbing horribly and almost touching her face. She stepped in afright, her heart beating with terror, ready to turn back and fly. But she thought of her love, the rosy dawn of a new life of lasting happiness, and resolved not to falter in her purpose. She pinned her skirts together between her ankles, so that the grasses could not reach under her dress, and putting her hands on both sides of her eyes, so that she could not see the *lataniers*,



with their bobbing black heads and squirming arms, pushed eagerly forward. Presently she came to a wide clearing, where the ground was a few feet higher than the surrounding swamp. It was the Metairie Ridge, rising like an oasis out of the marsh. In the center of the clearing stood a house built of huge logs, with big knots protruding here and there, like so many giant, menacing black fists. In the spaces between the logs were tufts of thick, black Spanish moss, swarming with gray-green lizards, fat and sluggish, crawling over one another in their efforts to hide from the biting wind. And sitting at the door, unmindful of the snow and wind, was an old mulatress, shriveled and dwarfish, letting a toad eat out of her mouth, just as a person sometimes lets a pet bird peck sugar from between the lips.

Lolotte stood as one petrified, sick and faint at the disgusting spectacle.

"I can guess thy errand, my pretty one," crooned the hag, in a voice strangely soft and musical for one so hideous. "Thou art in trouble and want my help." Then, boastfully: "Ah, grand dames and proud cavaliers have trod the path leading to this cabin, for the fame of Peau-d'Or, Queen of the Voudous, is far-reaching and her power limitless. Come hither, child. I will not harm thee."

Like one under the influence of a hypnotic spell, Lolotte obeyed. Then Peau-d'Or, Queen of the Voudous, made her sit beside the big wood-fire and warm herself. And when her cold limbs became supple once more and she felt the warm blood surge through her delicate veins, she told Peau-d'Or the story of her love for Lucien Dumont; told her of her quarrel with Pierre, of her false-hearted lover, of her unhappiness and of the tradition of her native



Bretagne.

"And I want thee to help me, great Queen," she concluded, simply, as if it was a matter of course.

The little black eyes gleamed and twinkled.

"Hast gold or jewels?"

"No; I am only a poor working girl. He wanted to give me diamonds and money, but he was not my husband and I refused."

Peau-d'Or angrily flung the toad away from her. It fell on the floor, where it wriggled and squirmed and blinked its popping eyes at its hideous mistress.

"Thou are a fool," croaked the old hag. "Thou are thrice a fool; first, for having loved him; secondly, for not having taken his money and jewels, and lastly for coming here on such a mission." Then she added, almost fiercely: "Thou are young and innocent and I like thee. Child, I would rather see thee cold and still in thy grave than the bride of Lucien Dumont!"

Lolotte shuddered and looked at Peau-d'Or with wonder and dismay.

The old mulatress resumed:

"Thou art mystified, but I shall not explain. It is a secret locked deep in that hard heart of mine." Then, after a pause: "I will help thee, my pretty one. I want neither money nor favors from thee. Give me the phial. I shall brew the potion and help thee regain the love of thy false one. But I must have a drop of thy blood to put in the cauldron."

Lolotte trembled like an aspen and drew back.

"But the legend does not say anything about blood," she faltered.

"The rites of Voudouism require it. No potion can be



brewed without blood—red, rich blood from the breast of a maiden; otherwise, the spell is impotent. Bare thy breast, child.”

She took a long, slender needle from beneath the folds of her dress and advanced towards the girl. Poor Lolotte shrank back in terror. Then she thought of her love and that everything would be lost if she faltered.

“Take my blood, take my heart, take my life!” she cried, deliriously. “Only, give me back the one I love. I cannot lose him—I would rather be tortured; I would rather die!”

She bared her breast and *Peau-d’Or* pierced the white flesh with the cruel needle and caught the blood in the palm of her left hand. So quickly and gently had she wielded the little bit of steel, that the girl felt no pain.

“Cover thy bosom now and be near while I brew the drink, for thou must watch the cauldron with thine own eyes, if thou desirest the spell to be potent.”

She took from a shelf a small brass cauldron, bright and shining, like her own bead-like eyes. She then filled the pot with water, and vigorously stirred the liquid with the hand in which the blood had remained where it had fallen, like a crimson blotch upon yellow parchment. She put the pot on the fire, where it was hottest and glowed brightest, and began a weird, dolorous chant, swaying her body to and fro and gradually pouring the contents of the phial into the boiling liquid. And as the water boiled and steamed, the toad ceased its wriggings on the floor and hopped upon the hag’s shoulder, watching the simmering cauldron, blinking its little eyes and licking with its needle-like tongue the wrinkled, shriveled face. At last the decoction was brewed. It had simmered down to ex-



actly the quantity as was originally in the phial. Peau-d'Or poured the liquid, now a beautiful pale-rose color, into the phial and handed it to the girl, who had watched the ceremony without saying a word, her limpid blue eyes fixed all the time intently on the cauldron, just as she had been told to do. She was about to take the potion, when Peau-d'Or suddenly said, as if she had forgotten something:

"Wait, child; I was about to make a terrible blunder. The potion must leave here in one of my own phials."

She went to the shelf, took down a phial, and poured the rose-hued liquid into it.

"It is a trifle larger than thine, but I have no smaller size," she explained.

She handed the potion to Lolotte, who put it in the folds of her shawl, next to her heart. She did not notice that, though the phial was larger than the old one, it was full to the top.

"Remember, if thou tastest a drop of the liquid, thou diest."

This was the parting admonition of the Queen of the Voudous as Lolotte went out of the door of the hut. And as she watched the slim little figure gradually fade away in the distance, her wicked eyes glittered and she muttered to herself:

"He would not have married thee, though he should have drunk all the magic potions of my art. It is better that events should happen as I have planned. Lucien Dumont, I was thy father's slave and he took advantage of my beauty and mistreated me and when he became tired of me, his cruelties drove me to the life of a beast; but I will be revenged in the person of his son. The potion will



set fire to thy brain and thou shalt die mad, mad, mad!"

She repeated the words with fierce exultation and laughed so loud and horribly, that the toad fell to the ground, where it wriggled and squirmed and blinked its popping eyes at its hideous mistress.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE HEART OF A GIRL.

It was still daylight when Lolotte left the hut of the Voudou Queen and began her weary trudge back to the city. Her heart was buoyant with hope, for she had the magic potion and she heeded not the cruel, biting wind, the coiling grasses and the undulating lataniers and reeds, with their fearsome heads and arms bobbing up and down, keeping time with the ever-changing blasts which swept across the Congo Plains.

She had reached the city now. Just as she crossed the Rue des Ramparts, the storm burst in all its fury and the snow almost blinded her. How she congratulated herself that she was well out of the swamps. She would have perished had the snow caught her there and the lataniers would have coiled their wriggling arms around her and smothered her and fought like a million devils over her body.

With downcast eyes and unsteady steps, she began her weary walk out Rue St. Pierre to Rue Conde, as she wanted to reach the Cathedral before the doors were closed and thank God for the successful termination of her mis-



sion. She was not alone. Hundreds of clerks, shop-girls, mechanics, merchants, and even capitalists, who had lingered "in town" to make snow-balls and amuse themselves, unable to procure transportation, were also wending their way homeward, uncomplainingly jogging along, tripping one another in the drifts, laughing, jesting, delighted at the novelty of trotting home in a snow-storm in the streets of the boasted tropical city of the Southland.

Everybody seemed happy; everybody laughed and jested, except the drooping little figure in black calico and old-fashioned shawl. She was lost in somber thoughts. What if she reached the Cathedral too late? God would think her ungrateful. At this thought, her heart sank and she quickened her steps.

She had never had a real lover until this handsome, polished man of the world, with a fleeting fancy for a poor working-girl, had said "I love you, little one." He always called her "Little One." He had such a sweet, delightful way of pronouncing this pet phrase of his.

He had wanted to give her money, fine dresses and jewels, but she always refused. He had begged her to leave Madame Vachonette's musty old shop for his sake, but she had to earn a living and could not accept money from him unless he was her husband. So he had promised to marry her and had spoken of the grand wedding they would have in the Cathedral; how proud he would be leading her down the center aisle, marching blithely to the solemn tones of the organ. She had believed him. It was Paradise and then—despair.

On, on she trudged through the blinding snow. Now and then, some gamin would throw a snowball at her and the cruel missile would make a scarlet mark on her delicate



skin. But she minded it not. When she reached St. Anthony's Alley, she stopped and hesitated; the dark passageway, running between the high buildings and the church, looked so dismal, so deserted, that her courage wavered. But she felt the little phial in her pocket and pressed on resolutely. As she turned into Conde Street, a fierce gust of wind, coming directly from the River, whirled around the corner, chilling her to the bone. She involuntarily stopped and a man hurrying behind her ran rudely against her. She uttered a moaning cry and fell heavily to the ground. The man stopped, apologized, helped her to rise and gently led her to the Cathedral steps, where he advised her to rest for a few moments and she would be all right.

"I shall wait until you feel stronger and guide you home," mademoiselle," he said, kindly. "It will be quite dark shortly. It is a fearful weather for a lady to be out in."

"You need not wait, monsieur," she answered. "You did not hurt me and I feel I am myself again. I must have slipped on the ice. I am going in the church to say some prayers and shall remain quite a while."

Just then a feeble ray of light from the oil lamp at the corner fell upon the man's face. If any of our readers had been passing by, they would have recognized our old friend, the erratic, good-hearted Gouneville.

"Take good care of yourself, mademoiselle. Good evening."

He courteously doffed his hat and walked away, not wishing to appear too obtrusive.

Lolotte ascended the Cathedral steps. To her dismay, the door was securely fastened. For a long time she stood



there, disappointed; then she thought:

"I'll come to-morrow evening. I hope Madame Vachonette will let me go a little earlier."

It was quite dark now.

She again entered the Passage St. Antoine and walked toward Rue Royal; but, when she reached that thoroughfare, bewildered by the snow, she turned in the direction of Canal Street, thinking she was wending her way toward her home in Bayou Road, almost a mile in the opposite direction.

And the snow beat against her and the wind howled; but she trudged bravely on, tightly clutching the little phial the Voudou Queen had given her.

How cold the wind was! Lolotte kept as close as she could within the shelter of the houses jutting on the street; but the moment came when she felt she could not proceed any further. Her head was aching, her teeth chattering, her limbs numb and hardly able to support her.

"I wonder if I am near home," she thought.

Just then she saw what appeared to be a breach in the wall.

"An open door," she said to herself. "I may find shelter for the night among some charitable people."

She stumbled into the opening and fell upon something hard and cold.

She groped about and discovered she had come upon a short flight of steps. She ascended the steps and found herself in a niche, where the snow had not fallen and where the chilling wind could not penetrate.

"The entrance to some grand family mansion," she thought.

It was so warm and comfortable in that sheltered nook.



She stretched herself upon the cold flags of the porch and felt her strength gradually coming back. She would rest for a few moments and then resume her way. Her home could not be far, now, for she had walked many, many squares.

How she had loved him. Even after she had seen him arm in arm with the proud, stately Mlle. de St. Croix on Canal street one evening, when he turned his head away and looked indifferently in the shop windows as he saw her approaching, she felt certain that, deep in his heart, he still loved her and had acted thus not to compromise her in the eyes of the woman he was escorting.

How warm and comfortable it was in that secluded corner. Had the storm ceased? She no longer felt cold—only, a drowsy sensation, a feeling of sweet comfort and restfulness. Why go to her room, so cold and cheerless, with its fireless grate and innumerable crevices, through which the wind blew in chilling, penetrating gusts? She would go to sleep where she was and wake up stronger and more vigorous in the morning.

Yes, she forgave him. He had given her the only glimpse of heaven in her barren life. She, poor, ignorant, despised, could not, and should not, have expected more; he lived and thought in a higher sphere, which she could never reach. She would not force him to love her. In the morning, she would throw the contents of the phial away and go back to her humdrum life. While her dream lasted, the world seemed brighter, grander and the shadows dared not meet the light. And now? It would be as if eternal darkness had suddenly enveloped the earth; as if joy, happiness and hope had forever vanished. But she would annoy him no more. She would resume her tedious



trudge along life's thorny pathway—

But she had fallen asleep.

Midnight tolled from the steeple-clock of the St. Louis Cathedral. As the last chimes died away in the distance, mingling with the moan of the wind and the bluster of the snow, the soul of a pure-hearted maid, tired of its sojourn on earth, winged its flight past the darkness and the night, past the glittering constellations, into the region of silence and mist, to peace and rest, forever and forever.



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

*"Found dead in the snow!"*

What a weird fascination these startling words have for this hardened man of the world, seated comfortably by a blazing fire, reading the chronicle of daily happenings in *L'Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orleans*? He turns the paper over, tries to read other articles, but his thoughts unconsciously revert to the tale of the poor girl found dead in the snow, within the very shadow of his door.

"Poor thing," he muses, sympathetically, "if she had only knocked, she would have found comfort and shelter here. Why, Blanche would have given up half of her own bed to thaw her back to life. I think I'll go and take a look at her."

Impelled by a resistless impulse, he summons his carriage and is soon at the morgue, mingling with the curious crowd grouped about the unfortunate girl, beautiful even in death. Someone touches his arm and a hand is held out to him.

"Why, how do you do, Guoneuille. So, you too, are here, impelled by morbid curiosity?"



"I had an idea it was someone I had met before," observed Guoneuille. "Why, it's the poor thing I bumped against near the Cathedral last evening. I had a presentiment that something would happen to her."

And he told Dumont the incident of the evening before. The latter looked pensively at the calm, still face.

"Poor child, how she must have suffered," he remarked. "It would be desecration to allow her to be buried in Potter's Field. I will take charge of the body and give it a decent burial."

He has the girlish form encased in a costly coffin, purchases a flower-kissed plat in the St. Louis Cemetery, where the snow has fallen too gently to harm the forget-me-nots and roses, and with his own hands helps to lower the soulless clay into its final resting place.

And Blanche, standing by the grave, her eyes dim with tears, for she had been very fond of the gentle, blue-eyed little milliner, silently presses her brother's hand, prouder than ever of him, thanking God that his heart is so full of sympathetic charity for a frail bit of humanity, who had been cruelly tossed about by the turbulent billows of adversity.

And the world, that great, presumably all-seeing Eye, which seeks to fathom the very souls of men, but which goes no deeper than the surface?

"What a good man," says the world.

The newspapers praise the unselfish generosity of the young artist; mothers teach their children to lisp his name in their daily prayers; even his sweetheart, the proud Madeline, in whose cold bosom compassion is almost unknown, kisses him with more tenderness than usual that evening; maidens weave roseate dreams about this Che-



valier Bayard of the Nineteenth Century and ask good St. Anthony to give them a husband as kind, as large-hearted, as unselfish as this ministering angel.

Does he feel sorry? Well, hardly. She was only a child of the street and the romance could not last forever. He had acted his role to his satisfaction in the pitiful drama in which this daughter of poverty had been the heroine and he could look the world in the face with unflinching complacency.

Such is the heart of a man; such is the way of the world.



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### MONSIEUR BOULOTTE'S GRAND-DAUGHTER.

Three months passed and Lolotte was now forgotten. Even Blanche, who had wept with sincere grief at the unfortunate girl's tragic end, now seldom thought about the incident. Carnival balls and other social functions diverted her mind into gayer channels. Life is too short to be forever brooding over the misfortunes of humanity.

One evening, as Dumont was alternately reading and dozing at the *Cercle des Artistes*, Guoneuille burst into the room and frantically grabbed him by the arm.

"Dumont—Dumont! The most extraordinary thing in the world happened to-day!"

"I am pained to hear it," observed Dumont, making a wry face and gingerly feeling his arm. "Why don't you break a fellow's arm and be done with it?"

"I beg you a thousand pardons, but, you see, I am excited—"

"I am sorry to be able to corroborate your assertion," interrupted Dumont, moving his arm up and down and critically examining it.

"Just think of it—I have unearthed little Marianne's parents!"



It was Dumont's turn to evince preliminary symptoms of excitement.

"The deuce you say? Sit down, Guoeneuille; sit down, and tell me all about it."

Guoeneuille looked about the room, but seeing only the attendants present, took a seat beside his friend and said, in a mysterious whisper:

"She is a great-great-granddaughter of Madame Pradel!"

"The patriotic dame in whose house the Revolution of 1768 was hatched and who sheltered and abetted Villere, Lafreniere, Boisblanc and the other conspirators against the Spanish crown?"

"The same."

"Then she is a granddaughter of old Edmond Boulotte, the anti-American?"

"Yes and the sole heir to the spacious gardens where Madame Pradel's conspirators feasted and plotted."

Dumont warmly shook his friend by the hand.

"I congratulate you, old fellow. And now, tell me all about it."

"It's just as much a romance as the narration of my meeting with little Marianne. And you will see, if you listen patiently to my story, how natural it was for me to find a resemblance between Marianne's mother and a face I have seen before. As you know, Monsieur and Madame Boulotte live alone with their slaves in the home of the old man's grandmother. They still cherish the delusion that the City of New Orleans begins at the Esplanade ramparts and ends at their plantation. They have never been up-town since Louisiana was purchased by the American and look upon that district above their plantation as a



distinct and separate city from the town founded by Gouverneur Bienville. To them, it is the habitat of the detested American, that restless, money-grasping, iconoclastic race, who, looking with derision upon the customs and traditions of the Ancient Regime, immolate the epic and chivalrous upon the altar of progress and greed. For some reason or other, the Boulottes took quite a fancy to me when my parents died fifteen years ago and I have been a constant visitor of theirs ever since. Tuesday and Friday are what they call my 'reception days' and I am always sure on those days to find some special delicacy awaiting me and a comfortable rocker placed where I can have an undisturbed view of the semi-country landscape which melts away in the swamp beyond the city limits.

"Monsieur Boulotte, who is a man of education and refinement, in spite of his antagonism to modern ideas and innovations, often entertains me with reminiscences of the good old days before the French Monarch sold us like a herd of sheep to the Spaniards—that almost legendary period in the history of New Orleans, when chivalry was in its zenith in the Province of Louisiana.

"'Ah, but those times are gone forever,' observed Monsieur Boulotte one evening, about ten years ago, after he had told me how he had received that sword-thrust which had left such a large scare on his neck. 'Men only think of money-making schemes in these days of haste and greed. Oh, how I hate the soulless people of this irreverent age!'

"The almost sightless eyes sparkled with unconcealed hatred, the wrinkled hands trembled with excitement and tears coursed down the furrowed cheeks. I was about to say a few kind words to calm the old man, when Madame



Boulotte entered.

"*'Pauvre Vieux!'* she remarked, going to him and caressing him. 'You must excuse him, Jules. To-day is the anniversary of a painful incident in our lives and Edmond always feels despondent when he thinks over the terrible events of the past. *Mon pauvre vieux!* Control yourself, dearest.'

"She bent over and kissed his forehead. The old man raised his head and taking his wife by the hand, arose and went toward the mantelpiece, over which hung the portrait of a beautiful girl of about sixteen. I had often admired that pure, Madonna-like face and even written an emotional poem about the unknown original, but I had a vague presentiment that the subject would be a painful one to the old folks and had patiently waited for them to speak; but they had never done so.

"For some moments, the aged couple stood gazing at the portrait. Finally, Monsieur Boulotte observed:

"*'This is the sixth of February, is it not, Mamam?'*

"*'Yes, Pierre.'*

"*'Exactly twenty years, is it not?'*

"*'Twenty years.'*

"They did not seem to be aware of my presence and spoke in faltering tones.

"*'Twenty years since that wretch darkened our home!'* resumed the old man, brokenly. *'Twenty years—and not a word, not a ray of hope.'*

"Madame Boulotte threw her arms around her husband's neck.

"*'Oh, my darling Stephanie! My innocent, my lost and erring child,'* she moaned. *'Shall we ever see your beloved face again?'*



"He put his arms around her waist to steady her and they both sank on a sofa, where they wildly embraced each other and sobbed convulsively. I thought it best to leave the poor old souls alone, feeling I had no right to share in their great and mysterious sorrow, and walked out of the house, an involuntary tear dimming my eyes and my heart heavy with grief.

"I hardly slept that night. I tossed about in bed, weaving romance after romance about Stephanie, the 6th of February and the sudden mysterious grief of the old couple, formulating and dismissing in the same breath all sorts of wild and impossible theories with wearisome monotony.' "

Guoneuille stopped and seemed lost in thought.

"Go on, Guoneuille," said Dumont. "You stop at the most interesting part."

"It is a long story, Dumont, and some of the events happened years ago. But as you want to bear it through, I'll resume. I called on the Boulottes the day following the events narrated above.

"'What a treat, my dear Jules,' was Monsieur Boulotte's hearty greeting. 'I am so glad you did not wait until Friday—your day, you know—as Mamam has gone to make a *neuvaine* and I was bothering myself playing *solitaire*. We can now have a lively game of chess.'

"To say I was surprised, would be expressing it mildly. Hardly twenty-four hours previous, I had left the venerable couple in the throes of a most poignant grief; and here was the old man, whom I expected to find plunged in the deepest gloom, chatting and joking like a merry school?boy!

"'I have no work to do before noon and thought I would



come and bother you a while," I explained, a little confused.

"He gave me a hearty hand-shake.

"The boring is all on my side," he said, pleasantly. 'You are as welcome here as if you were a cherished son.'

"We seated ourselves at the little round table on the side gallery, where we began what promised to be a 'lively' game of chess, judging from the aggressive way in which my antagonist made the traditional 'pawn to king four' move.

"You beat me shamefully the last time we played," he said, dexterously taking my queen's pawn with his knight, and chuckling at my forgetfulness in not protecting the piece. 'This time, you will not win a game.'

"I smiled defiantly, but his words proved true. I lost three games in succession.

"How badly you play to-day!" exclaimed the old man, after I had overlooked a check-mate which a novice would have easily prevented. 'I think you are in love, my dear Jules. What are you looking at, anyhow?'

I was seated directly in front of the window opening in the room where the portrait of the beautiful girl was suspended and had spent the entire time looking at the perfect features, instead of paying attention to the game. The old man craned his neck to discover the cause of my diversion and as his eyes encountered the silent orbs of the picture, the chessman he was about to place on the table fell from his nerveless fingers and he would have fallen had I not caught him in my arms.

"My darling Stephanie! My poor misguided child!" he cried, piteously.

I spoke soothingly to him and he soon regained his self-



control.

"‘Pardon my weakness, my dear Jules,’ he said, in quavering tones. ‘The knife-thrust was given years ago, but the wound is still bleeding.’ He paused a moment, then resumed: ‘I owe you an explanation. I trust you and will confide to you the secret which for years has caused the shadow of gloom to hover over our home. Come into the room, so that no indiscreet ear may overhear us.’

...e went into the room and sat in front of the mantelpiece. Whether on purpose or by accident, the old man sat with his back to the picture, while I found myself face to face with its attractive loveliness. And while I looked, a strange and unaccountable thing happened. The childish-care-free, innocent face no longer smiled from that mysterious picture. In its place was a care-worn, wan-featured woman of about forty—but the eyes of the two portraits were alike. I looked at the old man. He was deep in thought, his head resting between his hands. I arose, walked toward the mantelpiece, rubbed my eyes vigorously and again scrutinized the picture—but I only encountered the smiling, silent, laughing face of the lovely girl, whose perfect, half-parted lips seemed to taunt my perplexity.

"‘Bah,’ I thought, resuming my seat, ‘It was merely an hallucination, caused by my romantic imagination.’

"Just then, Monsieur Boulotte took his head from between his hands and said, lowly, if his thoughts were far off and he was talking to himself:

"‘When the events I am about to relate happened, I was cashier of the Banque d’Orleans. My married life was happy. We had only one child, Stephanie, the light of our home and the idol of our hearts. One fateful day,



a young American, who called himself Stephen Randolph, came to the bank to transact some business. He represented wealthy Eastern capitalists who desired to invest in suburban real estate and build a railroad to Lake Pontchartrain. But, it was all talk and bluster. They never accomplished anything and it was not until LeBeau, who, as you know, obtained the franchise, that any decisive steps were taken and the road actually built. But this has nothing to do with my story. One day, my wife and Stephanie stopped at the bank to let me know that they had received an invitation to take dinner at my father-in-law's house and that I should come and meet them there. Just as I stepped into the street to escort them back to the family carriage, Randolph was about to enter the bank. He stopped short on seeing me and I could not help introducing him.

"‘My wife and daughter, Mr. Randolph,’ I said, proudly, for his look of admiration when he noticed Stephanie had not escaped me.

"‘He bowed, and then stepped aside to allow the ladies to pass. The carriage whirled away and we re-entered the bank.

"‘‘May I have the pleasure of calling at your house, Mr. Boulotte?’ inquired Randolph, after we had transacted our business. ‘Oh, you have a beautiful daughter, my dear sir,’ he added, in tones which did not at all please me.

"‘You are of our race, Jules, and are aware of our disinclination to allow strangers to enter our homes. We are hospitable and gladly help those in need, but we call a halt when the destinies of our daughters are menaced. For generations past our sons and daughters have taken for



helpmeets only those in whose veins runs the proud blood of France and Spain; and the audacious aliens who from time to time have sought to thrust themselves in our midst have been taught lessons which they never forgot. Randolph acted and talked like a gentleman; but I knew nothing about his social standing, and did not care to inquire. As a business man he was quite welcome; beyond this I was not willing that our relations should extend. I felt like slapping his face for his impudent familiarity; but he was a wealthy client, whose business the bank desired to keep, and it was best to be diplomatic.

““My family is limited to three, Mr. Randolph—my wife, my daughter and myself,” I observed, with studied politeness. “Stephanie is too young to receive company; she is a mere child—barely seventeen years of age. We never have visitors, and you will find us dull entertainers, I am sure.”

“I could see by the way his face flushed that he understood my hidden motive, but he gave no outward evidences of displeasure. On the contrary, he argued that I certainly underrated by abilities as an entertainer; that he would take the risk, at all events, and make his first visit the following Tuesday. I told him I appreciated the honor he was doing me; had he been a mind reader, however, he would have discovered that I felt more like giving him a good drubbing than tendering him the hospitalities of my home.

“That night, I told my wife about Randolph's intended visit. Stephanie, who had been unusually serious during the evening, having complained of a slight headache, gave a start and gaily observed:

““Oh, I am so glad, pap! He is such a nice, hand-



some gentleman!"

"I was dumbfounded at this outbreak.

" "You forget yourself, mademoiselle!" I said, sternly. 'Let it be the last time that I hear you speak so flippantly."

"Stephanie lowered her eyes. Her lips quivered, and she threw her arms around her mother's neck and sobbed as if her heart would break.

" "Oh, mamma, mamma!" she cried "Papa has scolded me!"

"It was the first time I had ever spoken harshly to her!"

"Here Monsieur Boulotte stopped, and for several minutes remained silent. I could see there was a terrible mental struggle oppressing him. Poor old man! I could guess in advance the sequel of the stranger's advent into his happy home. Presently, he resumed in low, scarcely audible tones, as if speaking to himself:

"He came as promised and every Tuesday thereafter or about six weeks. I never allowed Stephanie to come into the parlor while he was present. He did not seem to miss her, never speaking about her and I thought he had dismissed her from his mind. There is where I made the error of my life. Had I killed him when he asked permission to visit my house, I would have been spared all these years of torment and grieving. The deception of the despicable wretch come upon me like a thunderclap one day. Stephanie not coming down to breakfast, her mother went to her room, thinking she was ill, for she had been acting strangely the day before and had laughingly answered that it was merely an illusion on our part when we remarked that she seemed ill. I was just about pouring milk into my cup, when I heard a piercing scream, and the



noise of some heavy body striking the floor reached my ears. I bounded upstairs, and as I rushed into Stephanie's room, I came upon the senseless form of my wife. I gave a glance about the room, seeking for an explanation, and the sight which met my eyes caused my senses to reel—Stephanie's bed had not been occupied that night! It was only by a great mental effort that I did not swoon—the shock was so great and unexpected. I noticed a piece of paper pinned to the curtains of the bed. I grasped it and read the following words, written in trembling, tear-be-smeared characters:

““I loved him too much and have gone with him. I knew you would kill me if I told you.”

“The days which followed are a perfect blank to me. I was told afterward that the slaves had rushed out of the house and raised an outcry, telling the neighbors that we had been killed by some unknown assassin. The neighbors rushed in and found us lying senseless on the floor. My wife was brought back to life in a few moments, but it was months before I fully recovered my faculties. Since that day, we have lived apart from the world, praying and hoping that our little Stephanie will come tripping down the street one of these evenings, greet us in the same old sweet way she used to do when she was our idol and kiss away the tears from our cheeks!”

“Poor Monsieur Boulotte! I remained with him until his wife's return and then went home to ponder over the sad romance which had darkened the lives of the good old souls. Ah! one almost feels impelled to tax God with injustice when the searchlight of compassion brings into view the undeserved miseries which oppress humanity.”

Again Guoneuille stopped in his narration and gazed



fixedly at his listener.

"That can't be all," observed Dumont. "You have not yet told me how you came to find out that the Boulottes were little Marianne's grand-parents."

"I'll come to that in time. What I have been telling you is simply the preamble and happened years ago. Great heavens, what a fool I have been all these years!"

"I entreat you to answer my question," said Dumont, persuasively.

"I am an ass, the son of an ass and the grandson of an ass. I never had, have not, and never will have a grain of common sense. Just think of it—it took me nearly fifteen years to discover that little Marianne was the grand-daughter of the Boulottes!"

Dumont arose and nervously paced up and down the room.

"I admit that you are the most stupendous imbecile the world has ever had or ever will produce," he said, impatiently. "I agree with you and approve every word you have just uttered—but for the land's sake tell me what you ought to have divulged an hour ago: How the deuce did you find out the relationship between little Marianne and the Boulottes?"

"Sit down, Dumont—sit down, and I'll tell you all in a few words," resumed Guoneuille, ominously shaking his head. "The funniest thing in the world—the climax of this most extraordinary narrative—happened this morning. I have been promising the Boulottes for a long time to bring my finacee to see them. I stopped at the shop to take Marianne with me this morning, but she had gone to Vachonette's to order a new Spring hat. I left word for her to put on her most stylish dress and to come and



meet me at the Boulottes. I am *sans facon* with the old folks and knew they would not mind whether we came singly or together. In the meantime, I could play chess with old Boulotte, instead of waiting at the store for Marianne and being bored to death by the Oujatte couple. As I entered the long walk which leads to the house, I saw the eager faces of Monsieur and Madame Boulotte pressed against the window-pane, as if they expected someone. Then, like a flash, I remembered that it was the 6th of February and that every year it was the same vigil, from early morn until late in the evening. The old folks had the insane idea that their long-lost daughter would return on the anniversary of the day of her flight and their faith in the delusion seemed to me one of the most pathetic vagaries of the human mind which had ever come into my notice. Admitting that their daughter would return, how in the world would they recognize her? The twenty years of exile had certainly greatly changed her and, instead of a happy, romping, care-free girl, they would clasp to their bosom a woman of mature years, no doubt broken in spirit and weighed down with sorrows and grief.

The couple greeted me pleasantly, but they seemed more daft than ever.

“‘I cannot account for it, my dear Jules,’ observed the old man, ‘but I feel that our little Stephanie wil soon be with us. Do you not feel that way also, Mamam?’

“‘Yes,’ answered the old lady. ‘Every evening for the past week I have sat here, so as to stretch forth my arms to clasp her as soon as she comes into sight. She is coming, *mon vieux*—I know it; I feel it.—To-day is the 6th of February, you know, Papa.’

“‘Yes, Mamam.’



"They seemed to have forgotten my presence and were again anxiously peering through the window. I began to feel sorry that I had unintentionally selected to-day to make the presentation. So I said nothing to them about Marianne's coming, intending to leave after a few moments and intercept the girl on the way, giving her some excuse or other for having changed my mind. I had been chatting with the old folks for about half an hour when Madame Boulotte, who had not left the window for a second, suddenly veered about and excitedly cried:

"Papa—Papa!" Come quick! Our lost lamb has returned to the fold!"

"The old man hobbled to the window and eagerly looked out. I glanced over his shoulder and saw little Marianne, coming leisurely up the garden-path, stopping now and then to pluck a flower. She presently looked up and seeing us, gaily waved her hand and ran toward us. Like one in a dream, I went to meet her, wondering whether I had not myself become suddenly daft, so strange and unreal did the scene appear. The old folks were in a sort of rhapsodic trance and seemed glued to the window.

"My fiancée," I said, coming in with Marianne.

"What immediately happened would take a lifetime to depict and a century to forget. With a cry of delirious joy, the old folks caught hold of the astonished girl and wildly embraced and caressed her.

"Our Stephanie—our lost lamb—our treasure!" they cried in chorus.

"Marianne, having already been told by me that the Boulottes were eccentric to the extreme, thought that this was one of the star numbers of the programme of introduction, for she returned their caresses, called them en-



dearing terms and finally gently disengaged herself from their encircling arms and gazed curiously about the room. As she caught sight of the portrait of the long-lost Stephanie, she gave a start of surprise and walked up to the mantelpiece.

“*Parrain—Parrain!*” she cried, joyously. ‘How in the world did you get my picture painted, when I never sat for it? It is by Millistoon? Am I that pretty?’

“I looked at Marianne, then at the portrait—both features were the same and I was ready to swear that it was Marianne’s and not Stephanie’s sweet face which smiled upon me from the old gilt frame. A shaft of light direct from heaven illumined the darkness of the past and I understood everything. And as I gazed upon that mysterious picture, a film came over my eyes and the same change I had noticed years ago took place. Again I saw looking down upon me the face of the sad-eyed woman I had met in the garret of a miserable hovel years ago and who had died like a dog in the street. What demon of pride must have possessed her! What misery, what anguish of body and soul she must have gone through, knowing that her parents were almost within calling distance, yet, to atone for a sin which no doubt weighed upon her like lead, she kept on the useless struggle against adversity? All these thoughts whirled through my mind like a flash of lightning. I pressed my hands to my temples, the room whirled around like a Maelstrom and I sank upon a sofa. When I came to myself, Marianne was bending over me.

“‘How you frightened me!’ she exclaimed, looking anxiously into my face. ‘It must have been a sudden attack of vertigo.’



"Yes, I have been writing too much lately. I'm all right now. Where are the old folks?"

"I put them to bed. They said they felt sleepy and wanted no one but their 'darling Stephanie' to attend to them. They are the looniest"—

"Hush, little sweetheart! You must respect them. Sit down beside me and I'll tell you a story."

"I told her everything, Dumont. There was no use hiding. She is a bright girl and I did not need to go into unnecessary details. I advised her that it was best in humor the old folks and let them believe she was their long-lost daughter instead of their grand-daughter, as they had only a few years yet to remain on earth and were happy in their strange delusion.

"I shall do as you say, my dear *Parrain*," she replied, thoughtfully. "It does seem odd, though, when one comes to think it over. Just think of it—I am my own mother!"

"Little Marianne is a most extraordinary girl. She accepted the transition from a pauper to an heiress as a matter of course. And here the matter rests, Dumont. The little humbug has installed herself with Monsieur and Madame Boulotte as if she had been there all her life and has instructed me to sell her little shop in Rue St. Ann or give it to someone as an offering to St. Anthony for her good fortune in finding her parents."

Again the poet-journalist became thoughtful. Dumont presently aroused him from his reverie by remarking:

"And now you have no excuse for delaying your marriage?"

"I don't know about that. People will say I am a fortune-hunter and that I should have married the girl long ago. She is young, Dumont—young, pretty and fascinat-



ing. She will have suitors by the score now and amid the glitter and glamour of the new world in which she will move, who knows if she will not look upon her faithful old Guoneuille with disgust and—and—"

Here he broke down and buried his head between his hands.

"Come, now—brace up," said Dumont, kindly. "Little Marianne loves you too dearly to forget you for a moment and would not swap you for a Zulu prince of any potentate on earth.—A brilliant idea: Suppose we make a double tragedy of the entire business?"

"When is your wedding coming off?"

"On the 12th of next month."

Guoneuille shook his head.

"Too soon, Dumont—too soon. How in the world can the girl make her trousseau in six weeks? You are an ass, Dumont—a monumental one."

He had now regained his old-time spirits.

"Thanks," resumed Dumont. "I assure you, however, that you libel the brute creation when you call me an ass.—What say you to our celebrating the events of the day by an old-fashioned skylark at the Absinthe House?"

"An admirable suggestion. We are sure to find Chain-arre there. What a pity that he has descended so low mentally that he won't be able to enjoy the full spirit of our celebration!"

They called for their hats and canes and walked out of the *Cercle*, as gay as two schoolboys about to invade a forbidden orchard.



## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE WEDDING.

It was in the Spring of 1831.

There was a great stir in and about the St. Louis Cathedral. Scrub-women were hurrying to and from with great buckets of water and big cakes of yellow soap; workmen were busily engaged in tacking and fastening bunting and garlands of wild roses and evergreens inside the church; the choir was dolorously rehearsing the wedding march from Tanhauser; the frame-work of an awning stood in front of the massive door, ready to receive the canvas; baskets of flowers were scattered here and there.

A laborer, carrying his tools in his hands and an enormous pipe in his mouth, seeing the unusual air of activity, asked a carpenter who was consolidating the frame-work of the awning what it all meant.

"Monsieur Dumont, the artist, and Mlle. de St. Croix, are going to be married this evening.—Why, what is the matter with you, man?"

The laborer was trembling like an aspen and had clutched one of the awning posts for support. But he walked away without saying a word and the carpenter mut-



tered to himself, in no amiable mood:

"Those drunken fellows are a nuisance. If he had caught hold of the other post, instead of the braced one, the whole business would have tumbled to the ground."

And he resumed his work, looking with uneasy suspicion at every passer-by.

The ceremony was for five o'clock, but long before that hour, the church was filled with the fashionable world of New Orleans, decked in its daintiest finery, chatting, laughing, criticising, impatiently waiting the arrival of the bridal party.

At last there was a subdued bustle in the choir and the organist began playing slowly a sweet, soft tune. First, a ripple of plaintive modulation, then a dreamy melody, with soft, minor notes scattered through it like tear-drops. Suddenly, there was a thunderous crash of chords and the prelude to the wedding march began rolling its waves of harmony through the church, until the very walls trembled.

Every head in the vast assemblage was instantly turned toward the entrance and curious eyes intently watched every movement of the bride and groom as they slowly wended their way to the altar.

"Those whom God hath ordained should love, no chance of fate shall part. To have and to hold, to cherish, honor and obey, through joy and through sorrow, through glory or shame, for better or worst, until the solemn hour of death."

It was the voice of the priest, intoning the nuptial benediction.

And, way back in the rear of the church, a man with blanched face and blood-shot eyes, uttered a blasphemous



oath and shook his clenched fist at the celebrant and the kneeling assemblage. What was to him the sublimity of God, the sanctity of the church, when the man who had robbed him of his sweetheart, the wretch who had wrecked a pure, trusting heart on the reefs of passion and lust, was idealized by the world and his shame condoned by the servant of God!



## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE LOVE LETTER OF A POET.

"I wonder why Parrain does not come. We shall be late for the reception. Ah, someone at the gate. It must be he."

And little Marianne ran into the garden to meet—a messenger, who handed her a bulky envelope.

"From Monsieur Guoneuille," he said.

With feelings of trepidation, Marianne ran to the light and feverishly broke the seal. A glance at the contents of the missive quickly dispelled whatever anxious forebodings she had.

"Of all the craziest madmen," she laughed, "*Parrain* is the craziest. Instead of coming at the appointed time, here's what he sends. Listen, Grandpa."

She sat on a footstole beside Monsieur Boulotte and read aloud the following remarkable communication from the erratic Guoneuille:

*In My Den, March 12, 1831.*

DEAREST MARIANNE: The Mississippi River at flood-tide is a drop of water trickling down thy window-pane, compared with the tears I am shedding as I think of the



luck of that scamp of Dumont, who was this day married to the stately Mlle. de St. Croix, while I, who have for years sighed and prayed for an union with my love of loves, am still sighing and praying. Ah, but a glint of silver has penetrated the clouds which so long hovered over us and hope tells me that ere many months have dragged by, my little sweetheart shall be mine.

Sweetheart, three long hours must elapse before I shall see thee again—three centuries of torture and impatience. While counting the seconds as they slowly ebb by, my mind becomes reminiscent and reverts to thee, my little Marianne, who came into my life like a gleam of sunlight, warming my cold heart and guiding my footsteps upward to the light.

‘It is so sweet to love and to know that one is loved. God has given to mankind the love of flowers and all that is beautiful in nature; to me He has given a priceless boon—my love for thee and thy love for me.

Sweet is the breath of the evening breeze and soft its caressing touch; plaintive the murmur of the rustling leaves; gentle the sigh of the dying day. How serene, how rest-inspiring is nature! The whole world nods and seeks peace and oblivion from toil and care; the birds chirp to their happy mates in the shadowy foliage; the moon, like a spectral eye in the ethereal blue, peers timidly down, bathing the tree-tops with its refulgent rays. Everything proclaims contentment and happiness; but to my heart, it is only the ebb of one more day of anxiety, the beginning of another vigil, waiting for that morrow of happiness which the future has in store for me.

As I sit in the solitude of my room, watching the wavering twilight melting into the darker shadows, I take thy



picture from its accustomed place on the wall, where it smiles to me as I throw it a kiss each night and greets me as the sunbeams shine upon it through my lattice-bars at dawn. As I look upon thy sweet, calm face, thine eyes seek mine through semi-darkness, half-reproachful, half-appealing, soothing my sorrowing heart, making the pain of separation less hard to bear.

Sweetheart, there is not a moment of the day that I do not think of thee. Love has bewitched me. Those eyes, in whose glorious depths I have so often read passion and devotion, seem to shine with a living light to-night, piercing the mists which separate us, blotting out the misspent years and bringing into life again the frail hopes that my weary heart thought had died in endless pain.

“Sweetheart, I love thee!”

Such is the confession, written in my own handwriting, on the back of thy picture. Simple, commonplace words, which have been repeated by lovers from time immemorial and which shall be reiterated again and again until the world grows cold and the universe is studded anew with radiant constellations.

“Sweetheart, I love thee!”

How many times have I repeated these words? And yet, they always seem new. How can it be otherwise? The memory of thy ineffable sweetness pursues me everywhere, waking or dreaming, with a persistency I cannot resist. I feel that I cannot live without thee. I am thine. I am a part of thee. I suffer if thou art sad; I grieve if thy heart is heavy. I have tried—God knows how hard—to forget; but I feel it is a useless struggle. Since I first met thee, I have loved thee: I will go on loving thee till I die.



You ask me why I love thee? How can I tell, sweetheart? Like the timid dewdrop which fell from high heaven upon the violet's bosom, to share its life and fate, you came unasked into my life and I loved thee ere I was aware of it.

Thou hast made a coward of me. I am afraid to rove this weary world alone, lest some provoking gnome should taunt me and make me falter on the way. Yes, Sweetheart, I need thee to guide and shelter me, through sorrow and through darkness, until life's sands are spent and my soul hesitates on the abyss of eternity, ere returning to the God which gave it a temporary tenement of clay.

Sweetheart, there is no light beneath heaven which can compare with thine eyes, no sound so sweet, melodious as thy caressing voice, when thou art near and I feel thy gentle hand close-pressed against my own.

Thou art my love; thou art my dream; thou art my life. I am nothing; I am simply a soul—a soul aflame with love; a soul full of melody, singing but for thee; a soul ardent with desire, sighing but for thee; a dreamful, adoring soul, all thine for ages and ages to come.

Thou art my queen, my radiant night, my starry night, my love of loves. I am nothing. I am only a heart, an ardent heart, whose every pulsation is thine—a heart full of passionate love . . . a heart thou hast conquered, subdued, made captive by thy incomparable loveliness . . . a heart which is thine until earth no longer whirls through space . . . a heart which will adore thee until the stars which gem the universe fade into nothingness . . . a heart all thine own until the leaves of the Judgment Book unfold!

Thou art my love, thou art my dream, thou art my life.



I am nothing. I am only a soul—a soul aflame with love, kindled by thy potent sorcery; a dreamful soul, a soul full of hope and faith; a soul all thine, in this and in worlds hereafter. My heart is weary with waiting, my eyes dim with peering into the fathomless gloom which separates us, eager for the sight of thy beloved face. Every shadow I see, every sound, every murmur I hear, every chirp of bird or cry of the night, fans the fires of impatience which are consuming me, makes my heart beat with sudden, oppressive suddenness, makes every moment seem dull, leaden centuries.

Sweetheart, I shall love thee alway. I shall never change. I am the same as in the past; to-morrow, the day after, and the weeks, months and years to come, I shall be unchanged. Trust me, confide in me. I shall watch over thee with as much tenderness, with as much vigilance and solicitude, as a mother watches over her sleeping babe.

So, Sweetheart, come with me and rove this fickle world; weave with me Utopian fancies and dream the old, sweet dream. Those glorious eyes of thine shall be my beacon and guide me to azure skies impearled with radiant constellations, where love's reign is eternal.

Sweetheart, the moonbeams are growing brighter and the star-sheen proclaims the birth of one more night of veiled expectancy. Fondly, pensively, I take thy picture from its frame and as I gaze long and yearningly upon that calm, sweet face and kiss it again and again, the darkness of the past melts away. I fancy myself once more beside thee, with only the silent stars to witness and bless the happiness of two ardent hearts, the swooning of two dreamful souls in a kiss of passionate love. . . . The



frail bit of cardboard is no longer cold, but feels warm and sentient to my lips.

Sweetheart, I shall keep my lips unkissed until we meet again.

GUONEUILLE.

Marianne's eyes were bright with delight.

"Is it not divine, Grandpa?"

But Monsieur Boulotte was fast asleep. Guoneuille's missive had proved a powerful opiate.



## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE TRAGEDY.

There was gayety and feasting in the Dumont mansion on the evening of the big wedding which had been the talk of the town for weeks previous. Lights glimmered everywhere; slaves, decked in holiday attire, were as numerous as bees, waiting on the guests, rushing here and there at the command of some strutting gallant or capricious beauty; revelry reigned supreme.

In a corner of the second parlor, Guoneuille was entertaining about half a dozen women—old, young and debutantes. He had the reputation of being a wit and a something of a cynic and was very popular with the ladies, who were always highly amused by his drollness and bon-mots.

"Woman," he remarked, in answer to a question as to his opinion of the gentler sex, "is essential to the happiness of man and prevents him from becoming a degraded brute. But there is one thing wanting in her: she lacks discrimination."

"Monsieur Guoneuille," observed Blanche, who had joined the group and had heard the last remark, "I object



to such an impeachment."

"It's because you lack discrimination, mademoiselle."

"You cannot prove it. I throw you the gauntlet."

"My dear Miss Dumont, it is impossible for a woman to discriminate. As compared with man in this respect, she is woefully lacking."

"It is man's conceit that makes him believe such things," argued Blanche. "I have been a close observer and I am sure that woman is not only more discriminating than man, but that hers is a much finer discrimination. Men, in their blundering way, fail utterly in discerning certain things which are as clear as day to the finer discrimination of women. I defy you, Monsieur Cynicus, to disprove this."

Guoneuille smiled ironically.

"Last night," he said, slowly, "I was talking to sixteen women and I told them a story a sailor had just told me, their reception of which convinced me conclusively that the point I seek to maintain is correct."

"Tell us the story," chorused the group.

"Have I your permission, Mademoiselle Blanche?"

"Certainly, for your stories are always entertaining; but I warn you that I'll be on my guard and that you will not be able to fool me."

"Hum," said Guoneuille, "the immediate future shall disprove this. Here is the story: The sailor told me he had just returned from a long voyage and that while his ship was in the Pacific, the captain had picked up a shipwrecked mariner on an island many leagues from the mainland. The case of this poor castaway was the most remarkable, not to say terrible, he had ever heard of or read, among all the tragedies of the sea. The man had



lived but a day after his rescue, but had had sufficient strength to tell his dreadful story of suffering. He had been cast on a small island where there was absolutely no food and only a spring of fresh water, and very little of that. He had saved nothing from the wreck, except a knife and a pair of spectacles, which happened to be in his pocket. He was so near-sighted he could not see without glasses. There was some driftwood along the shore and from this he made a fire, using his spectacles as a sun-glass and setting in a blaze the shaving he cut from the wood. He kept the fire going in the hope that it might attract the attention of some passing vessel, but none came and at the end of three days he was suffering the most exquisite torture from hunger. Still no ship came and the days went by, until at last he resolved to eat himself."

The ladies gave a concert of small shrieks and drew closer to the narrator.

"With this grim determination," continued Guoneuille, "he sharpened his knife, and having torn his shirt into strips, with which to bind his wounds, he cut off his left hand half-way between the elbow and the wrist. This he cooked over his fire and by careful economy, prolonged his life. Still no ship came, but hunger did, and a hundred times worse than before. Then he cut off his right hand. This lasted him several days longer and hunger came again, but no ship. Then he cut off his left foot and lived off it for five days. When he was picked up, he was on the point of cutting off his right foot, but fortunately he was saved from further self-demolition and cannibalism. That's all, mesdames."

The story was so horrible that his listeners fairly shud-



dered.

"Dreadful, awful, sickening!" they cried simultaneously, and they all began sympathizing with the terrible fate of the poor ship-wrecked sailor.

Guoneuille listened to them with curious interest.

"The other ladies to whom I told the story," he said, slowly and solemnly, "received it exactly as you have done."

"And why shouldn't they?" asked Blanche, her eyes dim with tears at the thought of the poor mariner's awful fate.

"They might have discriminated," replied Guoneuille.

"It is no time for discrimination, even if there was anything to discriminate," said Blanche. "It is a case calling for the sympathy of all those whose hearts are not of rock."

"Still," protested Guoneuille, smiling maliciously, "a little discrimination or discernment, or something like that, might have prompted the inquiry as to how the poor wretch could have cut off his right hand and his left foot, when his left hand was the first to be cut off. When the sailor told me the story, I told him he was a prevaricator, but I have not yet heard any such intimation from you or the other ladies to whom I narrated the painful episode. Good evening, mesdames. I see Chainarre beckoning to me and he no doubt wants me to go out for a smoke."

He stalked off majestically and walked out of the room arm-in-arm with Chainarre.

"What an atrociously hateful man," said Blanche. "The idea of concocting such a disgusting story."

There was profound silence for a few seconds, the women taking turns in looking at one another and wondering what it was all about, anyhow; then the music began and the cavaliers to whom they had promised dances came to



claim their fair partners and the incident was soon forgotten in the mazy intricacies of the old-fashioned Creole quadrille.

Among the notable guests at the wedding feast were Maxime Millistoon and his beautiful young wife. The artist had returned from Europe a week previous, bringing his bride with him. He had married three years before and the union had been blessed with two children, both girls, the prettiest little tots imaginable. Madame Millistoon was said to be of noble birth and had been adopted by the artist's spinster aunt. The union of the young folks had been her life-long dream and she died blessing them and leaving her nephew a colossal fortune. At least, such was the story which Guoneuille had told Little Marianne and to tell Little Marianne something was the same as posting the news on every dead wall in the city, and the statement was received with unhesitating credulity everywhere. Society was delighted and received the young matron with open arms.

The wedding-feast was the grandest the old town had seen for a long time. But it finally came to an end and Dumont was soon alone with his bride and his sister. It was with pardonable pride that he had led his wife into the home of his ancestors. Blanche had changed rooms with her brother, as she thought the room overlooking the garden would be more appropriate for the young couple. For weeks past workmen had been engaged in renovating the interior and a neglected rookery had been turned into a modern palace. There was still about the mansion an air of faded grandeur which suited Lucien's antiquarian taste and he had purposely allowed the old facade to remain untouched, not even by the painter's brush; but the



rooms had all been freshly frescoed, the antique furniture renovated and varnished anew and the house furnished throughout with those contemporaneous luxuries which wealth, well-directed, can procure. The mansion, over a century old, seemed to wear its gaudy adornments with patrician dignity. The whole place appeared to rejoice, in its quiet way, over its restoration to respectability.

Houses, especially those that have seen a great deal of life, acquire an individuality that is almost human. Lucien and his wife talked of this strange fact as they chatted with their guests in the brilliantly-lighted parlors, resplendent with their garlands of white roses and carnations. Madeline referred to the peculiar fascination which the old homestead had exerted over her when she first roamed about the spacious rooms, years ago, when she was a child and played with Blanche, at the time when Lucien, then a mere stripling, was dabbling in arts and letters at Spring Hill College.

It was almost midnight when Lucien and his wife retired. They had been asleep but a few moments when they were aroused by a sudden cry that seemed to come from the hall:

"Help! Help!"

Lucien jumped out of bed in afright. His wife was sitting upright, a look of terror in her face.

"Help! Help!"

Again the awful sounds reverberated through the house. Seizing his sabre, Lucien rushed into the hall. He felt sure he would find a tragedy in full play. There was no one there. He thought it strange that the slaves had not been aroused by the cries. He ran to the parlors. They were both vacant. He went to the head of the stairs and



peered into the darkness. He could discern nothing. There was one room left—his sister's. He opened the door and the sight which met his gaze froze his blood to icy coldness. Blanche was dead and upon her bare white throat were the marks of murderous hands. He felt faint and weak and was about to fall to the floor when again he heard the fearful cries.

"Help! Help!"

To his horror, this time the voice was his wife's. Rushing back into her room, he fainted at the sight before him. When he came to his senses, hours after, the wax taper on the mantelpiece was burning dimly. The wind had arisen and in the garden and just outside the open window the leaves moaned like a soul in pain. Lucien feebly approached the bed. His wife lay still and cold in death, her beautiful white throat bruised and swollen.

Then, like a flash, came back to his memory the words the poor little milliner had spoken, months before:

*"If ever you are false to me, I will die of a broken heart and my ghost will come back to earth and haunt you and harm those who are dear to you."*

There he was found in the morning, weeping and raving.



## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### GUONEUILLE'S MYSTIFICATION.

"When the devil was cast out of heaven, he fell to earth and broke into several pieces. His head rolled into Spain, his heart in Italy, his stomach into Germany, his arms and hands into England and his feet into France. This is why the Spaniards are so haughty, the Italians so amorous, the Germans so gluttonous, the English so grasping and the French so fond of running after women."

Having delivered this remarkable utterance, for the benefit of his friend Chainarre, whose half-closed eyes gave indubitable evidence that he was not feverishly interested in the peroration, Guoneuille filled the glasses in front of him with absinthe and handed one to Chainarre.

"And that is why, Chainarre, having a Frenchman for father, a Spaniard for mother, an uncle in the palace of the Pope, a sister who married a German and being the proprietor of an English mastiff, you are the incarnation of all the vices under heaven. Here's to your prototype, the Prince of Darkness."

He drained his glass to the last drop, and resumed:

"So Millistoon is back, eh? Accompanied by his wife,



too. What a stunner she is. She is the niece of a marquis or the grand-niece of a king—I don't remember which. Sly dog, that Millistoon. Runs away to Europe to hasten the death of an old aunt, kills and buries her, marries into the nobility and comes back to this sleepy old town with his wife, his millions and his brats. Here's to Millistoon and his accessories."

He stopped and again helped himself to the absinthe.

"But what a feast that was to-night! I tell you, it takes us boys to startle society. Dumont's wedding will be the talk of the continent. It's a pity we did not stay for the dancing—but you were making such a hog of yourself, swilling champagne and making indecent toasts, that I was forced to take you away. You'll never get used to respectable society. You are irredeemably depraved, only fit to associate with Mere Jiguette and her gang of cut-throats. You humiliate me. You will bring my gray hair in sorrow to the grave."

He cast a reproachful glance at his companion. The latter leered stupidly in reply and rubbing his finger against a nose whose color could vie with the gaudiest floral display, said:

"Lesh have shdrink."

He filled the two glasses with the greenish beverage and mechanically gulped down both in rapid succession, ignoring Gouneuille's extended hand. Guoneuille looked fixedly at him and sadly shook his head.

"To what depths of degradation can a human being descend," he said, pouring himself a drink and disposing of it with evident satisfaction. "A fine specimen of God's most noble work you are, Chainarre. You are a sot, a low, driveling inebriate, a blot upon the profession of men of



letters. You remind me of a story I read when I was at the *École des Beaux Arts*. It told of a pilgrim who, while trudging wearily through a forest, came to a spot where the path he was following branched in two different directions. The path leading to the right was narrow and grass-grown and appeared to have been little traveled, while the path leading to the left was broad and well-trodden and multitudes could be seen walking briskly away in the distance. The pilgrim stopped and saw an old man sitting on a stone which marked the parting of the ways. 'Whither goest?' asked the old man. 'I see but one way,' answered the pilgrim. 'I follow those who came before me.' 'Wait,' said the old man. 'I am Keeper of the Roads and none can pass without my permission. Look at the two ways. I will let thee have thy choice. Think well before thou chooseth, for there is no turning back. The road to the right leads to Heaven; the one to the left, to gold and diamond mines, wealth untold and eternal perdition. Choose.' The pilgrim laughed loud and merrily. 'Let me pass, old dotard,' he said. 'The narrow path hath no charms for me.' And, taking up his staff, he entered the road to the left. That's just how you are, Chainarre. If you were given to choose between absinthe and the road to Heaven, you would die with an absinthe bottle glued to your lips."

He stopped and kept on gazing pityingly at his companion; then, suddenly:

"It's half-past eleven and I have time for a waltz with the bride before she retires. Dumont will never forgive me if I am not there to shake hands with him and Little Marianne will have no one to take her home. I'll excuse you, Chainarre. I'll say you have broken your leg.



Dumont knows your friendship for him and he'll understand.—Can't you tell a fellow goodnight?"

He shook him until his teeth rattled, but he might just as well have tried to arouse a statue. He walked away in disgust and looked anxiously up and down the street.

"Not a cab in sight," he grumbled. "It's only a couple of blocks, anyway."

It took him half an hour to reach Dumont's house, two blocks distant.

"Hanged if it isn't all over," he muttered. "I wonder who took Marianne home? I'll challenge the scoundrel to-morrow."

He was about to turn back, when piercing cries came from the room right over where he was standing:

"Help! Help!"

He stopped short and listened. Not another sound. Perhaps it was a hallucination, caused by the absinthe he had been drinking all evening? He had been told that absinthe drinkers saw and heard things which had no material existence. He was about to proceed on his way, when again he heard the awesome cries:

"Help! Help!"

He could not be mistaken. It was awful reality. Perhaps Dumont had become suddenly insane and was murdering everybody in the house. He stumbled into the *loge* and fumbled about for the door-knob. He found it, turned it jerkingly and pulled vigorously at the door. To his surprise, the door swung open and he found himself in the lower hall, in complete darkness. He peered into the gloom and listened. Everything was as silent as the grave.

"I wonder if I really did hear cries, after all?" he



thought. His legs were wobbling so, he had to sit on the bottom steps to prevent himself from falling. He waited five, ten, fifteen minutes, half an hour. Not another sound.

"Guess it was the absinthe," he concluded.

He arose with difficulty and stumbled into the street. He finally reached his home, thoughtful and mystified, resolved never again to drink absinthe, if he lived a thousand years.



## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### A FAMOUS MURDER TRIAL.

The case of the State of Louisiana against Lucien Dumont is still cited by the legal profession as one of the most extraordinary in the annals of criminal jurisprudence.

The accused, a man of wealth, refinement and talent, in a moment of sudden homicidal mania, had strangled his bride and his sister on the night of his wedding. The evidence, although wholly circumstantial, was overwhelming. He was found in his room on the morning of the tragedy, raving like a madman. He had been taken care of by his friends and an investigation instituted by the police. The slaves were closely questioned and were certain that no one but their master, his wife and his sister were in the house when they retired to their rooms in the rear of the house. During the night, Labiche thought he heard cries. He got out of his room to investigate, but finding the door which led to the main house securely locked, concluded that it was imagination. This door was not usually locked, but he thought his master had done so to reassure their new mistress, who probably felt nervous and timorous in a strange house and had asked that all doors be locked.



No one had for a moment thought of accusing Lucien Dumont of the crime, but on the night of the tragedy, a man coming from his work in a foundry, called on the captain of police and told an extraordinary story. His name was Pierre Latour. The night before, while returning from an octoroon ball in Rue Bienville, he passed the Dumont mansion on his way home. It was probably midnight or a little after. He heard a man's voice in anger and a woman sobbing and thought it peculiar. Impelled by an inexplicable curiosity to discover what the quarrel was about and seeing that the street was deserted, he climbed into a tree and looked over the fence. He saw a bright light in a room. A woman was kneeling and seemed to be pleading and a man was standing over her, with uplifted fist, as if about to strike her. He recognized the artist Dumont, from his having been pointed out to him in the street on one occasion.

"Well, it's none of my business," he had said to himself. "So they also have their quarrels, those proud aristocrats? And they beat their women, too."

He had got down from the tree and gone home. He did not know that there had been a wedding in that house that night. He had forgotten the occurrence, until he heard of the double murder when he stopped at Mere Jiguet's for an appetizer on his way home. He had put this and that together and, being an honest man, had concluded to tell what he had seen to the authorities.

For a month Dumont lingered between life and death. He finally recovered and was arrested, charged with the murder of his wife and sister. He made no defense, simply saying:

"It was the wili of God."

"It was the will of God."



This was taken as a tacit confession of guilt.

I will not burden these pages with the tedious report of the trial of Dumont. The transcript of the case can be found in the old record room of the Supreme Court building, in the Cabildo, on Chartres Street. If the reader desires to read the voluminous documents, Chief Clerk Tom McC. Hyman, or his deputy, Paul Mortimer, will courteously direct him to the dusty room on the third floor, where he will find, yellowed by the mould of years and half-hidden by cobwebs and dust, the *dossier* of the case of *The State vs. Lucien Dumont*.

The trial lasted two weeks, owing to the legal tilts between the great lawyers of the time—Dominique Seghers and John B. Grymes, retained by Dumont's friends for his defense, and Christian Roselius, then recently appointed attorney general by Governor Roman, and who was making the effort of his life to obtain a conviction in this *cause celebre*.

The only witness against Dumont was Pierre Latour, a simple laborer, totally disinterested in the outcome of the case, who, although subjected to a rigid cross-examination, never wavered in his evidence. He was not corroborated, it is true, but the fact that the doors leading to the slaves' quarters had been locked, and Dumont's stubborn silence, fastened the crime still more strongly upon the artist. He made no defense, simply saying it was the will of God. The jury deliberated for three days, at the end of which time they solemnly filed into the court-room.

"Have you gentlemen agreed upon a verdict?" asked Judge Gastinel.

Armand Pitot, the foreman, handed the judge a slip of paper, which the judge in turn handed to the minute



clerk.

"Guilty; strongly recommended to the mercy of the court," read that official.

The prisoner was led away by Guoneuille,, who had been a dazed spectator during the entire trial and had not left his friend's side night and day since the morning of the tragedy. The poor fellow, in his inmost soul, believed that Dumont had committed the deed in a moment of homicidal frenzy, which he attributed to the reaction caused by his abstaining altogether from drinking absinthe.

But Dumont was not fated to die on the gallows. He became violently insane the day he was sentenced and died in a madhouse shortly afterwards.

And so it came to pass that the little group of absinthe drinkers, which originally consisted of six of the most convivial spirits of the time, dwindled down to two—Guoneuille and Chainarre. But Guoneuille was changed now. He gradually weaned himself from absinthe until one day he sheepishly announced to Chainarre:

"Little Marianne and I will be married to-morrow. This is my last visit here."

And Chainarre, unable to bear the blow of a separation from Guoneuille, deliberately drank himself to death inside of six months.



## CHAPTER XL.

### THE WATCHER BY THE GRAVE.

If you are an early riser or a late diner and have resided in New Orleans for any length of time, you no doubt remember a bent, venerable-looking old man, apparently over ninety years of age, who walked up North Rampart Street every morning at eight and turned in the direction of the woods when he reached St. Louis Street. He returned by the same route at sunset.

His last appearance was in 1890. I distinctly remember the old pilgrim. He never missed a day. Rain or shine he could be seen hobbling along the broad thoroughfare, looking neither to the left nor right, heedless of the throngs of clerks and shopgirls which jostled against him on their way to or from work. And if, impelled by curiosity, you had taken the trouble to follow the old fellow out St. Louis Street, he would have led you to the St. Louis Cemetery, where he would kneel beside a grass-grown grave and pray for hours and hours. There were days when he did not leave the cemetery until the sexton, good-hearted old Moise Rodrigue, was ready to close the gate. All day he stood gazing at the little grave, alternately kneeling and sitting



on a chair the kind-hearted sexton had placed there for him. And sometimes, long after the angelus had tolled from the Church of St. Anthony of Padua, he could still be seen praying by the ancient tomb, his poor weak eyes dim with tears. And the sexton, who had learned to love and revere the poor old soul, would go up to him, talk to him as one would to a child and gently lead him away.

Who was he? No one knew. There was a tradition that one morning, fifty years ago, a wild-eyed, disheveled man, dressed the garb of a laborer, had been found stretched across a newly-dug grave in the St. Louis Cemetery, moaning and evidently out of his mind. He was taken to the Charity Hospital, where for days he lingered between life and death. He finally recovered and as soon as he was able to walk he sought the spot where he had been found that cold November morning. And since then, he had never wavered in his mournful pilgrimage to the cemetery.

I had often met the old man and tried to draw him into talking to me, but he would answer my questions with a vacant stare, mumbling unintelligible words and hobbling away in an aimless sort of way. He was looked upon as a weak-minded dotard by the public and was given a wide berth by the gamins and street Arabs, who were afraid of his fixed, glassy stare and mysterious mumblings; but I felt that beneath that impassive exterior was an undercurrent of pathos and romance, in that outspent heart was hidden a dark secret of the past, securely guarded from an obtrusive and unfeeling world.

One Saturday morning, I attended early mass at the Italian Church of St. Anthony De Padua, at the corner of Rampart and Conti Streets, just around the corner from the St. Louis Cemetery. In some inexplicable way, the idea



occurred to me to visit the old graveyard and see the little mound beside which the old man sat and prayed day by day. I often had thought of doing so, but was unwilling to intrude upon the sanctity of the poor mourner's vigil and knew the cemetery gates were never opened before eight. It was then a few minutes after seven, but I knew that the sexton lived a few doors from the church and would be up preparing breakfast; so I knocked at his door and asked the loan of the gate key for a few moments. Sexton Rodrigue has known me since I was a boy and, after hearing my explanation, willingly complied with my request.

There was nothing peculiar about the grave. It was like hundreds of others in cities of the dead: a little mound, once no doubt well-kept, but now overgrown with weeds, with a granite slab in the centre. I tried to read the inscription on the gravestone, but the indentations were filled up with the dust and grime of years and the letters were undecipherable. I took out my pen-knife and dug around the letters. It was no easy task, for time and the elements had almost solidified the dust and grime and the porous granite yielded and crumbled into small pieces as the sharp steel entered it. After a great deal of hard work, I made out with difficulty the following words: "*Sacred to the memory of;*" then the granite had crumbled away, leaving nothing but a blur. Lower down, however, I could discern a few more letters. There was an "N," an "mb" and an "r," and then the figures "1," "8" and "3." It probably meant "November, 183—." The last figure of the year was totally effaced.

The mystery was now partially explained to me. It was the vigil of a lover by the ashes of the past, the romance of



a broken heart.

As I went out of the cemetery, the venerable pilgrim came hobbling in. I walked homeward in deep thought, determined to make one more effort to get the old man to tell me his life-story. Little did I dream how soon my wish would become a reality.



## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE CONFESSION OF PIERRE LATOUR.

I live only a few squares from Canal Street and, except on rainy days, always walk home after the day's work is over. I generally go down Rampart Avenue as far as Beauregard Square, and then take the short cut to St. Claude Street through the pretty park. On the afternoon of the day I had visited the abandoned grave in the old St. Louis Cemetery, I made a slight change in my daily programme. I turned into Conti Street when I reached the Italian Church of St. Anthony de Padua, to stop and chat with my old friend Rodrigue and try to get some information about the mysterious pilgrim.

"I have not seen him since twelve o'clock, when I brought him some soup and bread," replied the sexton, in answer to a question as to whether the old man was still there. "I guess he must be there. He has his fit of staying late this week and won't budge until I go after him. You can go and see for yourself, if you wish."

"No; I don't like to intrude upon the poor old soul."

"He will not see you unless you speak to him; and then



he will only stare and resume his praying. I am the only one he pays any attention to."

"Well, I'll go and take a look at him. I'll be careful not to disturb him."

Rodrigue walked with me to the end of the alley running parallel with Basin Street. He shaded his eyes with his hand and looked toward the rear of the cemetery.

"I can generally see him from here, but I notice that the chair is empty. He must be praying."

He turned back to the *loge* and I went on my way alone. As I neared the grave, I could see no sign of the old man.

"He must have gone without Rodrigue seeing him," I thought.

I heard a groan and advancing nearer, saw the old man stretched at full length across the little mound, his face buried in the yielding grass.

"The poor fellow will smother to death," I thought.

I went up to him and raised the snowy head from the ground. The glassy eyes looked into my face.

"I am dying, monsieur. Get a priest, for my soul is dark with sin."

"Let me carry you into the sexton's lodge," I said. "You will be more comfortable."

"No; I want to die here. Get a priest—quick! I cannot die like a dog."

I took off my coat, placed it under his head and ran to the church across the way. I explained matters to good Father Manorita, the pastor, and he hurried back with me.

When we reached the grave, I remained at a distance, to allow the moribund to confess his sins, but he beckoned me to come near.

"You can hear my confession, monsieur. The law can-



not reach me, for I will soon appear before the Throne of God."

He stopped, exhausted by this speech, but soon regained his strength. And there, in the city of the dead, with the silent tombs for witness, I heard the strangest confession which ever fell from the lips of man. I will tell it to you as I heard it, while the Angelus tolled from the old Italian Church and the glare of the ebbing day gradually melted into the shadows of twilight.

Here is the strong tale, in the simple language of the narrator:

"My name is Pierre Latour. I am eighty-two years old, but a thousand years in sin. I have dipped my hands in blood until they were gory—all for the sake of revenge for a wrong which a million years in purgatory can never condone. Sixty years ago, I was betrothed to the purest and most beautiful woman God has ever created. We were to be married in a few months, when a serpent entered our Eden and immediately there was discord and sorrow. He stole my sweetheart away and when he grew tired of her, cast her aside as one does a useless toy. And she, betrayed and dishonored, died of a broken heart. I swore to be revenged. One day, in passing by the Cathedral, I was told that a big wedding was going to take place and the name mentioned was that of the man I hated. I entered the church that evening with the intention of driving a dagger into his heart, but courage failed me. That night I passed by his house. It was ablaze with light and a grand ball was in progress. As I watched the scene of happiness, the enormity of that man's crime came back to me and I could hear the voice of my beloved cry out for revenge. I slipped unnoticed into the house and hid, waiting for a chance to



meet him face to face and kill him. I waited for what seemed hours. The guests finally went away and the house was dark and silent. I crept from my hiding place, locked and bolted the door leading to the rear of the house, so that the slaves could not come to help if there was a struggle, and, unlocking the street-door to facilitate my escape, entered what I thought was the bridal room. But I had made a mistake. It was his sister's room. In my haste to get out, I stumbled against a chair and my knife fell to the floor. The girl awoke, saw me and began screaming for help. Hardly knowing what I was doing, I seized her by the throat and choked her until she was inanimate. I heard a noise in the hall and cautiously opened the door just in time to see the brother run by and rush down stairs. Then a horrible idea surged through my mind. I had strangled the sister, why not the wife? I ran to the wife's room. She was sitting in bed, pale with terror and gurgled out a fearful scream when she saw me. I rushed upon her with the ferocity of a wild beast, choked her until she no longer struggled and sprang out of the window into the garden just as I heard hurrying footsteps in the hall. I could have killed him also, but thought my revenge terrible enough. The next evening, I went to the police and invented a story, accusing the man I hated of having committed the murders. Being a poor, ignorant laborer, my story was believed and he was arrested and convicted on my testimony. I was delighted. But he cheated the gallows. He became a raving mad maniac and died a few weeks after his conviction."

He had spoken with that inexplicable strength which approaching death sometimes gives, but as he stopped, his head sank upon his breast and I thought all was over. He



rallied, however, and said:

“Father, give me absolution.”

And while the good priest knelt and asked God to forgive the poor sinner, his soul returned to its immortal home beyond the stars, to sit in judgment before One whose finding is unerring and whose clemency is infinite.



## CHAPTER XLII.

“FOR ALL ETERNITY.”

Visitors to the old St. Louis Cemetery on Basin Street invariably stop in front of a little shaft of pure white marble which rises over a mound near the St. Louis Street wall of the ancient graveyard. A dove with outstretched wings rests on top of the shaft and an iron railing encircles the mound. Within the enclosure is a well-kept garden, always gay with roses, violets and immortelles. Cut deep in the marble, in letters of gold, is the following inscription:

LITTLE LOLOTTE.

DIED NOVEMBER 26, 1830,

Aged 20 Years.

PIERRE LATOUR.

DIED NOVEMBER 26, 1890,

Aged 82 Years.

“FOR ALL ETERNITY.”

You have perhaps wondered at the great number of years which elapsed between the two deaths and why the grave



looks so new and clean and the little garden is always gay with multicolored flowers. You have also wondered at the inscription under the names:

"FOR ALL ETERNITY."

Two simple words, whose depth of meaning only those who read this unpretentious romance can understand.

THE END.







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
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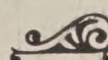
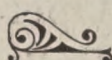
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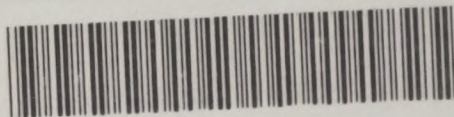


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